Homily, 23 February 2014
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Leviticus 19:1-2,17-18; Psalm 103:1-2,3-4,8,10,12-13; 1 Corinthians 3:16-23; Matthew 5:38-48

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Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.
... be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.
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Be holy. Be perfect. How do we do that? It would help if we had an example to follow. So let me give you a familiar example of holiness and perfection ... and I'll wrap it in a little story to make it applicable:
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He looked up when he heard a car pull into the driveway. It was Peter. As he folded-up his newspaper he heard the car door slam shut. He winced but he didn’t bother to get up, but just waited with his coffee. As Peter walked into the kitchen, he set down his cup and asked, “... is everything okay?”

Peter just grunted, took a cup, poured himself some coffee and sat down. ”Well,” said his Dad, “are you going to tell me about it?”

“It’s Jim,” said Peter. “He was supposed to help me take down that old mulberry tree in the backyard. So I went to pick him up and he wasn’t there. When I called him he said his friends invited him to play golf this morning.”

“Sounds like Jim,” said his Dad.

“Yeah, but I’ve had enough,” said Peter. “I do so much for him and he never returns the favor. Maggie and I took two days off to help him move back from Denver. Then I spent last weekend helping him paint his new place. It’s not fair! ... I give up. ... I don’t want any more to do with him.”

“Peter,” said his Dad, “he’s your brother; you can’t disown him. Besides, what you really want is for him to act like your brother instead of jerk. Peter just sat there.

“You were named after St. Peter,” said his dad. “At times, he really disappointed people too, but he turned out okay in the end. Jesus counted on Peter. He expected big things from him. Maybe now is a good time to remember that story.”
He took another sip of coffee, collecting his thoughts:

“When Jesus really needed Peter to be a friend, when he needed someone to stand by him, Peter left. He abandon Jesus ... denied him three times. After Jesus was killed, Peter even abandoned the work he had started. He just gave up on the whole project and went back to his life as a fisherman.”

“But that wasn’t the end of the story. Jesus returned from a pretty gruesome death. They met again on the shore, just as they had the first time, three years before.”

“So what did Jesus do this time? Did he turn away? Did he yell at Peter? Punch him out? No. He did exactly what he did at their first meeting. He called Peter to a new life.”

“Peter, do you love me?’ is what he said. Three times for three denials.”

“Dad, I'm not Jesus. What your point?”

“Son, you aren’t going to change Jim by staying mad. Jim is a good guy underneath. Someone’s just got help him see that for himself.”

“Jesus confronted Peter, reminded him of his betrayal ... but look at how he did it. Peter found his true self that day, the good man, hidden beneath the jerk.”

“Maybe you and your brother need to have a ‘seashore moment’ too. Find a way to tell him that he abandoned you, a way that gives him a chance to repent and move forward.”

Peter smiled at his Dad. “‘Be perfect,’ is that what your saying?”

“Yes! God’s perfection is love. So love more: be a better brother, a better friend, a better husband.

Don’t give up and say ‘I can’t be perfect.’ God knows you can’t do it by yourself. But with his help, you can do more than you imagine. Just give it try: ... be holy, ... be Jesus for your brother.”

He put down his cup. “Tell you what. Your uncle Ted and I were talking about playing tennis today. Maybe instead, we could get some exercise by taking down a mulberry tree. Let me give him a call and we’ll be over to your place after lunch.”