

First Sunday of Lent  
 March 4-5, 2016  
 Self-Reliance (Pride)

What is self-reliance (SR)? What is pride?

- There are many, many ways to describe SR, but today, I'd like to make only one point about it: When we ignore of the true identity of God and our own true identity we become afraid and distrust God.
- When did this ignoring of God's and our identity begin to happen? The Garden of Eden.
- Adam and Eve ignored God's explicit command and decided to make their way through life on their own. Their choice to live a **self-reliant life** has been handed on to each and every human being throughout history. It is called "original sin." OS really messed us up. Before original sin, life was awesome in the Garden of Paradise: there was no fear: Adam and Eve knew that God would protect them and provide for their every need.
- But after their **decision to be self-reliant**, the poison of **fear** was injected into the minds of men. And fear is what causes SR to flourish and multiply in the soul.
- So now, after the Fall, we know and perceive with a mind of fear rather than with a mind of trust. Lent is the time when we permit God to transform our minds of fear into minds of trust.
- **When trials in life confront our ego, our first reaction is fear, since the ego is fundamentally persuaded that there is nothing supporting it or backing it—that there is no Higher Power beyond itself upon which it can rely.** And so, when we fear, we rely upon our self and then the cycle of self-reliance, fear, and failure continue...
- When we fear, we can easily buy into the satanic lie that "God cannot be trusted to save you when you are suffering, when you go through trials in life."

So how does God heal us from SR?

1. "The Big Shake up."
  - God has to turn up the volume to shake up our world in order to make us recognize and accept the truth that **we cannot save ourselves** from our many problems, from our sins—and that we cannot get rid of the fear that pesters us merely by trying harder.

- He wants to **prove to us** that he is really out there, ready and willing to save us. And one of the primary ways he gets us to trust in him is by rattling our cage, upsetting our world, throwing us off balance.
  - Without this shake up, we will not see God's help, a.k.a. Grace, as relevant or even necessary for our happiness. That is one reason why he permits the shake-up, the failure, the fear to come in our lives. God allows us to fall so that when he picks us up we can be equipped not just to walk again, but to fly!
2. The "shake-up" facilitates a Revelation: we find out that we are not seeing ourselves the way we really are, warts and all.
- In 1954, an official portrait of Winston Churchill was commissioned by Parliament in honor of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. The 2016 Netflix series, The Crown, features a fascinating dialogue between Churchill and the artist commissioned to paint him, Graham Sutherland. Churchill is suspicious of this modern artist from the get-go. "Flattery or reality, cherub or bulldog?" he asks as he poses for the portrait. After a spell, Churchill wants a look at the artist's progress and tells him, "I know this face better than you do, Mr. Sutherland..."
  - To which Sutherland responds, "I find in general that people have very little understanding of who they are. One has to turn a blind eye to much of oneself to make it through life." Churchill replies "just concentrate on the good and all will be well." To which the artist responds, "Perhaps you elude yourself, sir."
  - When he sees the finished work, Churchill is enraged. He sees his self-portrait as "a pitiful creature on a stool, squeezing and squeezing. It is a direct assault on the office of Prime Minister. It is cruel!" to which the artist Sutherland responds, "Age is cruel! If you see decay, it's because there's decay...if there's frailty, it's because there's frailty. I can't be blamed for what is; I refuse to hide and disguise what I see. If you're engaged in a fight with something, it's not with me, **it's with your own blindness.**"
  - The portrait punctures Churchill's ego. In humility, he soon tenders his resignation as PM. Now the party will have a younger leader who is physically capable of accomplishing the duties that are required by the Prime Minister.
  - The revelation of the truth for Churchill facilitated the development of humility.

3. The upshot is this: we are just not as awesome as we think we are. The eyes of SR produce an illusion of clarity. We think we are seeing things perfectly, when in fact it takes someone else to show us that we are not as awesome as we think we are.
- We don't always like what we find out when we encounter the truth about ourselves, but the revelation of this truth sets us up to stop relying upon ourselves and start looking for a Power higher than ourselves to get us out of the "shake-ups" we encounter in life.
  - You have to surrender to a higher power. Those who have struggled with an addictions know this from the first step of AA. Christ doesn't ask his followers to "reform themselves" but to have faith...to trust in the power of God to change them.
4. Whereas SR is the inability to trust; surrender to God in trust is the solution.
- SR is like fearsome quicksand.
  - The harder you try to get out of the quicksand, the more enmired you become, the more afraid you become. So the solution is not to thrash around and try harder, but instead to accept help when it comes from a saving power that stands outside the mess you are stuck in.
  - So too when we find ourselves enmired in the quicksand of SR. We try to wiggle out of our life shake ups, then we inevitably fail, and then we blame ourselves for failing because we didn't try hard enough; and that often leads to self-disgust (which we will discuss next week).
  - So when we afraid and burnt out from trying too hard, we need to relax, and put our problems in God's hands....you've heard what you're supposed to do when you reach the end of your rope, right? Let go!
  - We need a Savior and his name is Jesus Christ.
  - When we reach out and accept his help, **we make an act of FAITH.** We trust. That is the solution to SR. Trust. That is what RCIA is all about. It's a process of gradual conversion moving the candidates from fear into trust...fears about being Catholic in spite of family opposition, fears about doing everything right, fears about fitting in—all gradually can dissolve into trust in God that everything will be OK as RCIA continues.
5. Application/Practical Helps
- Confession
  - Put Christ at the center of your prayer. When Christ is at the center, the soul becomes harmonious and tranquil.

- Grace to pray for: “Lord, I want to see things for the way they really are! Help me to see you as trustable and me as I really am. Open the eyes of my heart.”
- Learn to wait upon his help. Exercise the gift of trust.
- The light of God’s Love will shine on the glass of your life, which reveals the blemishes and scratches and cracks that you had not noticed in yourself... But when you accept God’s help, when you trust, you will also be made aware of how much you are loved and cared for, despite your blemishes and scratches and cracks—that you are a loved sinner...and that makes all the difference in the world.
- Surrender Novena.