

Homily for 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Do you know how certain African tribes capture wild monkeys? It really is quite ingenious. They hollow out a large pumpkin and then cut a hole just big enough for a monkey's hand to slip through. Then they fill the pumpkin with peanuts, tie the pumpkin to a tree and leave.

When all is quiet, the curious monkeys come to investigate. They smell the bait and reach through the hole to grab the peanuts. But the opening is not big enough for the monkeys to pull out their clenched fists. Stubborn and determined to have their treasured peanuts, the monkey is unable to break free of the trap. And so the monkey is condemned to be picked up and sent off to a zoo. All this because the monkey didn't know enough to just let go.

God created us to be happy. God created us to be filled with wholeness and joy, with love and understanding. And God shows us the way to these in the teachings of Christ in the gospel. But so often we are trapped by all the things we "hang on to". And even though we know they aren't doing us a whole lot of good, we don't have the courage to let them go. And so the closed hands of addiction, materialism and self-centeredness condemn us to a life of frustration, emptiness and loneliness. And no matter how desperately we want things to change, we expect it to

happen without doing anything to make it happen... we just can't seem to let go.

The words of the gospel might seem to some a bit complex. For Jesus speaks of "hating" one's father or mother, brother or sister. And we hear this word "hate" and we find it almost distasteful. But this is not the feeling those who heard Jesus' words would feel. For the Judean mind would understand the word to mean "detached"...detached in order to pick up or begin a new priority.

The gospel then is an invitation for us to let go of things that are imprisoning us, to become, in a word, detached, so that the fullness of God's love might become our new priority and our guide to living in the happiness that God deeply wants to impart to us. The only requirement is that we let go...let go of the things that trap us into thinking we are happy but which ultimately serve no purpose but to tie us down.

On this weekend in which we as a parish pay special honor to Mary who is our model of faith and patroness of our parish, perhaps we should remember that Mary teaches us what it means to "let go" and be "detached". For Mary allowed the voice of God to lead her to a life she could never have expected but which was available to her only because she was free enough to simply let go...let go of what might have been or what was in order to embrace the mystery of what might be in the loving

hands of God who forever calls us to enter into the mystery of his unequalled love.