

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

YELLING AT SINNERS?

Just recently, I got a haircut at a local barbershop. As the amount of hair I have has somewhat lessened over the years, the visits to the barber come less frequently and the sessions are shorter! I heard a story one time about a man with thinning hair. He went to the barber and asked if he would charge him less considering the fact that he had this meagre head of hair. But the barber said, "No sir. In fact, we usually charge more when we have to hunt for hair!" It doesn't seem fair!

In any event, I had my "ears lowered" as they say last Saturday. While I was in the chair, this barber, a "real character" gave me a little advice about my next sermon. He said, "Father, I don't like priests who yell about everybody being sinners. Why we're all sinners!" He then went on to say, "When you preach you should build people up!" Well, I thanked him for the haircut and also the advice. But I told him that really the job of a priest is to help people to see their sins and where they might have "gone off the track" spiritually speaking.

Yes, it's true that we're all sinners—priests included. After the past year with the scandals and corruption in the Church, most of you probably knew that already. Even though priests are sinners, we still have the sacred power given to us by ordination to bring people back to God through his grace. It's not a good idea to yell at people who are at least trying to do better.

Like a good doctor who wants to help a patient, a good priest needs to point out attitudes or behaviors that people need to correct and change. That is certainly not an easy thing to do in our own times when everybody is seemingly offended by anything you might say!

Archbishop Sheen once told about a stewardess that he met on a flight. She expressed interest in becoming a Catholic after meeting the bishop for several months. Sheen gave her instructions in the faith.

However, when the bishop gave her the talk about confession and the Sacrament of Penance, the lady got very angry. She stood up and started to leave the room. She said, "Now I'll never enter the Church after what I've heard here this afternoon!" Bishop Sheen looked at this young lady and said sensibly, "Listen, there's no explanation for such a reaction after what you've just heard!" Then he asked a telling question, "Have you ever had an abortion?" The woman hung her head down in shame. The bishop provided the moral of the story when he said, "It was not confession that was the problem!"

It's true to say I think that we have all done things in this life that we're not so very proud of. Yet Jesus Christ can heal and make all things new again. All we have to do is reveal our brokenness to the gentle and compassionate Savior. Despite our failings, the priest represents Christ in a very special way. In fact, a priest is sometimes called "Alter Christus" another Christ.

Obviously, the minister of the Lord should not get in his way. Mother Teresa once told a priest who was about to give a retreat to the sisters of her order, "Father, I pray that you don't get in the way of the Holy Spirit when you speak!" Not bad advice. The priests of the parish are here to help and not to hinder you on the road to eternal life and we won't yell at you!

*Sincerely in Christ,
Father Jerome*