

Fourth Sunday of Lent - C

“Please silence all electronic devices. Again, please silence all electronic devices.”

No doubt you’ve noticed that announcement at the beginning of Mass, and no doubt you’ve noticed that it’s the only announcement we repeat at the beginning of Mass.

The value of the repetition is that it makes the announcement stand out, and less likely to be ignored.

I’ve heard several people makes jokes about it, which is another indication that it is doing its job.

It has entered people’s consciousness, rather than faded into the background with all the other bits of information that run between our ears and that we really don’t pay attention to.

Today, we are celebrating the second scrutiny for Lindsay Clark, our elect who is making her final preparations for baptism at Easter.

“Didn’t we just do that last week?” you might ask. And the answer would be “yes.” And what’s more, there’s a third scrutiny coming next week.

Why the repetition? One reason is similar to the repetition of the announcement at the beginning of Mass: it heightens the importance of what is happening and fixes it more firmly in Lindsay’s consciousness as

well as in the consciousness of the community to which she belongs.

Repetition also brings out a deep spiritual reality: conversion is a process of gradually coming to a deeper awareness of God’s love and a more complete accommodation of our lives to it.

It’s not a one-time thing.

Normally, the scrutinies are celebrated in connection with the Gospels about the woman at the well, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

And so, the scrutinies lead the elect to an ever deeper realization of the mystery of sin and a greater willingness to be filled with Christ the Redeemer, who is living water, the light of the world, and the resurrection and the life.

If, this year, we celebrate this scrutiny in connection with today’s gospel, other aspects of the mystery of salvation come to the fore.

There’s a natural tendency, when encountering today’s Gospel, to focus on the conversion of the younger son. That’s a very dramatic part of the story.

But when we remember that the reason Jesus told this parable in the first place was because of the

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grumbling of the Pharisees, the situation of the older son becomes more important.

And, I think the older son's situation has a lot in common with ours as we struggle at times to stay on the road of ongoing conversion.

The older son's life is not dramatic. In fact, you might say it is filled with the tedium of daily work, which can leave a person numb to what God is doing in our lives and susceptible to the temptation to look at the world from a negative point of view.

In spite of the fact that all that the Father has now belongs to the son, he can find no joy in it. Gratitude is absent. He has succumbed to what the monastic tradition has called "the noon day devil."

The big difference between the younger son and the older son is that the younger son has finally come to the realization that he needs to make a change in direction. The older son has become too stuck to see that.

The parable stops before we discover how the older son will respond to the father's invitation to join in the celebration. Will he discover his need for conversion? Or will he persist in his ways?

Lindsay has been journeying on the conversion road for some time now,

and is preparing to make her commitment to Christ complete in the celebration of the Easter sacraments.

She asks again today for our prayers. As we ask that conversion to Christ be made complete in her, it presents us with a question: Will we ask that the work of conversion be completed in us as well?

Or will we persist in holding on to the aspects of our life which hinder the flow of grace into our hearts: bearing grudges, holding others back, being resentful of the good things God is doing in their lives.

Ultimately, the call to conversion is repeated throughout our lives. As our conditions change it takes on new forms. Thanks be to God, that he does not relegate the call to conversion to a once and for all opportunity to hear or ignore, but continues to call out to us all along our journey of life.

Lindsay is responding. Let's not leave her alone in that, but respond as well and accept the invitation to join in the celebration of God's love.