

4th Sunday of Lent - John 3: 14 – 21

A man was driving down a country road and he noticed that there was a chicken running ahead of his car and keeping pace with it. He looked at his speedometer and he was driving fifty miles an hour. So he increased his speed to sixty, and then seventy miles an hour. But the chicken just sped up. Outrunning the car, it took a right turn into a small farm and disappeared behind the farmhouse. The man was so astonished by the performance of the chicken that he pulled into the farm and knocked on the farmhouse door. A farmer answered. The man said, “I don’t want to be bold, but do you know that you have a chicken that can run seventy miles per hour?” The farmer said, “Oh I have a lot of chickens who can do that. On this farm we breed three-legged chickens and they are very fast.”

“Three-legged chickens,” said the man, “I never heard of that! Why would you want a three-legged chicken?” “For very personal reasons,” said the farmer. “You see, I live here with my wife and my son and we all like drumsticks. And so when we have a chicken dinner, we are always fighting over who is going to get the drumsticks. But, with a three-legged chicken each one of us has our own drumstick. There is peace in the family.” “That’s amazing!” said the man. “I never heard of a three-legged chicken. Are they good? What do they taste like?” The farmer shrugged his shoulders, “I have no idea. We haven’t been able to catch one yet.”

You see, sometimes more is not better. Sometimes the very things we think are going to help us actually pull us in the opposite direction.

Just examine American culture. There has never been a country in the history of the world where more people live a higher standard of living than we do in America today.

Longevity of life, discoveries in medicine, and the amount and variety of food are all increasing. But the number of sad people and people dealing with clinical depression is also increasing.

China, which has a much lower standard of living and where most people are struggling to make ends meet, has four times less cases of depression than we have here in the United States. Worldwide, the incidence of depression is on the rise especially among the young and the affluent.

Now this shows that the things we **have** do not guarantee happiness. For all the things that we possess, there are still many in our midst that live with emptiness, a spiritual hollowness that robs us of joy.

This can in part be explained because it is easy to confuse two things: fun and happiness. Fun is an emotion that we feel while we are doing something. Happiness is what we experience once we've done something and are simply living. Happiness is deeper and more lasting than fun. You can buy fun. You can't buy happiness.

If you have money and resources, you can buy a ticket for a Caribbean cruise or a trip to Disneyland. You can choose to enlarge the square footage in your house or buy a luxury automobile. All of these good things can be fun. But none of them will necessarily make you happy.

Our children today have the opportunity of playing more sports with better equipment and better technology than anything we could have imagined while we were growing up.

I believe that all of these advancements add to the fun of playing sports. However, that does not mean that children today are more happy than the children growing up forty years ago.

We as Americans can travel, communicate and live in comfort on a scale that would amaze most of the people in the world.

But none of these advantages indicate that we will wake up tomorrow more happy to be alive than a tribesman in the Congo or a peasant in Ecuador.

What we **have** does not make us happy. Who we belong to does.

If we can love ourselves and give and receive love from others, **that** is the secret of happiness. If we can live in those relationships, we can be happy despite what we have or do not have.

That is why Jesus' words are so important in today's Gospel. Jesus describes our most important relationship, our relationship to God.

Jesus says that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that we might have life. We believe in a God who loves us and wants to give us life.

Therefore, if we can open ourselves to that love, we can in the same action open ourselves to the love of others. Such love and such relationships are the only way of finding happiness.

So, don't confuse fun and happiness. If we can take God's love in and share it with one another that will make us happy.

But don't be deceived. Our odds of being happy through the fun we can buy or the things that we possess are very small. They are about as good as the odds of catching a three-legged chicken.

AMEN.