

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle C-2025

During the 1994 season, the Pittsburgh Steelers were awarded home field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs for their 12-4 record. In the Divisional Round, they easily beat the Cleveland Browns 29-9. The victory allowed them to host the San Diego Chargers for the AFC Championship Game. In the days leading up to the game, they unfortunately looked past the Chargers by creating a Superbowl video and setting up hotel reservations. They took them for granted because they believed they were the superior team and that all they had to do was show up and victory was assured. When the Chargers got wind of this news, their feelings of being totally disrespected helped to propel them to a 17-13 upset over the Steelers.

It is quite possible that the Steeler's devastating loss could be attributed to a bad case of complacency. Complacency can be defined as "to be smugly

satisfied with one's self, achievements, or current situation, often to the point of being uncritical and unaware of potential dangers or areas for improvement." Like the 1994 Pittsburgh Steelers, we often have our own struggle with complacency. In our youth, it can lead us not to put in the necessary time and effort to excel more in our studies, our preparation for the future, and our individual or team activities. As adults, it can contribute to us not striving to continually give our best in our careers and personal relationships. Embracing a spirit of complacency, or smug satisfaction, can prevent us from achieving higher levels of personal and relational excellence. Excellence comes through a sustained commitment to knowledge, growth, development, and improvement.

In our first reading from the Book of Amos, God calls out the Israelites for their complacency towards Him because they had become too content with a comfortable and prosperous life. The Bible is full of stories and examples of how a spirit of complacency, or excessive self-satisfaction, can become a serious

obstacle in our relationship with God. I would like to positively focus on how we can experience victory over the daily temptation of complacency with God. It begins with the personal conviction, that Jesus Christ is the most important Person in our lives and the reason for living. The more we become convinced of this, it will inspire us to resist the powerful pull towards complacency.

First, it will inspire us to want to draw closer and closer to Jesus Christ by: talking to Him in prayer; listening to Him as He speaks to us through the Bible, church teaching, and in our hearts; and receiving His love, grace, and mercy through the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation. We discover that our relationship with Him is a living and daily relationship that has the potential to grow and evolve by becoming more personal, mutual, joyful, and safe. All the things that make for a strong relationship with other people, is what makes for an awesome relationship with God. This relationship has a positive effect as Jesus Christ brings His goodness, wisdom, balance, inner peace, and a sense of purpose, into every area of our lives.

Second, it will inspire us to have an insatiable curiosity about God that will lead us to embrace a life-long labor of love of learning more about Jesus Christ. We want to know more about Him personally. What was He like? How did He live? What did He believe and teach? We want to know more about His humanity and divinity. We want to know what it was like for Him growing up as a 1st century Jew. We become fascinated by how the religion, culture, and family life of His day, formed “who” and “how” He was in His humanity. We want to know and better understand how He continues to speak to us today through the Bible and the teachings of the church on faith and morality.

As we embrace this religious curiosity, we will discover that “to know Him is to love Him.” We will have a growing desire to know Him more so that we can love Him more. Our motivation will not just be the accumulation of facts, but how this knowledge develops and deepens our personal relationship with Him and becomes a catalyst for our ongoing healing and transformation. We will desire to continually learn

so that we can better understand Him and enter more deeply into the marvel of His love for us.

Third, it inspires us to want to be a person of high moral character. We want to be more like Jesus. We want to imitate Him in our daily lives and relationships. We want to be His living presence for other people, especially as we live out our commitments and responsibilities to family and friends and those whom we serve through our calling and career. We want to make choices that are pleasing to Him, help us and other people to become the best version of ourselves, and that reflect His mind and heart.

We will desire moral excellence and a life of holiness. When we fall, and we will, love will inspire us to keep trying to “be” and “do” better with the help of God. We want to grow and change as an expression of how much we love God and are devoted to Him. Our trust in God’s love and mercy become the “wind beneath our wings” as we keep striving to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is not primarily or exclusively about duty or fear. The overwhelming inspiration and dedication is all about

love. How can I love Jesus more? How can I love Him better? How can I love Him more faithfully in matters small and great?

It is love that motivates us because God loved us first. He loved us first by walking this earth for 33 years, dying for our sins on the cross, rising from dead so that we can live forever with Him, and giving us the Holy Spirit and the Church so that we can habitually experience His love. On an individual level, God loved us first in the very act of creating us and by blessing us with gift of personal faith. Ideally, our response to Him loving us first is a spirit of thanksgiving and a relentless striving to be loving and faithful to Him.

Our relationship with Jesus Christ is meant to fill our lives with a profound daily and lifelong sense of mission. We are on a mission with Jesus and for Jesus. The focus of this mission is to know, love, and serve Him, and to inspire and help other people to do so. We are to do so in the ways that He calls us and how He provides us with daily opportunities. This mission is meant to be the ultimate and all-consuming “Great Adventure” of our lives.

I would like to finish the rest of my story about the Pittsburgh Steelers. In the 1995 season, they re-committed themselves to excellence expressed through their chosen motto of “60 Minute Men.” It was a season long reminder for them to give their best for the entire 60 minutes of every game. It didn’t mean they had a perfect year. They made many mistakes and lost more games than the year before, but they never stopped striving and fighting. They resisted the temptation to become too self-satisfied. Their new “60 Minute Men” motto contributed to them participating in Superbowl 30 at the end of the 1995 season, against the Dallas Cowboys.

As their “60 minute” mentality led them to participate in the ultimate prize of pro football, may that same mentality enable us to forever participate in the ultimate prize of our faith, eternal life with Jesus Christ. May the words of the singer John Legend come to characterize our own dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ: “Cause all of me loves all of you.” Love conquers complacency!