

Needy Week 2

Today we continue our message series called Needy. And yes, we are a needy people. In our humanity and our brokenness we have real spiritual, physical and emotional needs.

While God is self sufficient and certainly doesn't *need* anything, we, on the contrary, do.

As we talked about last week, we have needs that we must attend to if we are to thrive and survive.

Our physical needs include the need for nutrition and hydration. Our emotional and mental health needs include the need for acceptance, the need to belong and the need for love.

On top of all those we have our spiritual needs as well. You are needy. So am I. Our whole being is made up of a vast collection of needs.

God has created us with needs and gives us the responsibility of tending to those needs, not in a selfish way, but in a way that enables us to be more effective in ministering to the needs of others.

We're no good to others in service if we haven't taken care of our own needs first. In fact, making sure your needs are cared for is the necessary preparation for service to others. If we don't care for ourselves, eventually we will become someone else's problem.

In the Gospel of Mark Jesus tells us:

³*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

Mark 12: 30-31

As yourself. Jesus teaches that even our very ability to love *others* rests first and foremost on our love and care for *ourselves*. Look at the importance that our Lord places on loving and caring for ourselves.

But sometimes we deny our needs. Think of the times we needed help with something but were too proud to ask for it.

When we deny our legitimate needs, we are not moving towards health, we're moving away from it.

So during this season of Lent, let's take a closer look at just how needy we are, how to best meet those needs and, as a result, how to be healthier.

Last week we talked about some of the temptations we face when it comes to our needs.

The first temptation: is meeting legitimate needs in illegitimate ways.

We will be tempted from time to time to do something we know is wrong in order to meet a real need.

The Second temptation is meeting legitimate needs through short-cuts. Our need for love can take the form of looking for it in all the wrong places. Our need to belong may lead us to the wrong *kind* of people.

We can be tempted to settle for something that is only a shadow of the real need we experience. We can be tempted to take the easy way out, to go for the short cut.

The Third Temptation is *meeting our needs by worshiping them.*

We can end up turning our needs into our gods. We give to them our attention, our affection, and our ability, we may pursue them at all costs; money, fame, power, all these can become gods to us.

And so today, we want to talk about our greatest need. Our greatest need of all, our greatest need ever. This is our need for God.

Now, some of you are thinking,

Of course he's going to say that he's the deacon, Fr Gary is listening, what else would he say?

But you might also be saying:

"If our greatest need is for God, then why don't I feel that need more deeply, or perhaps at all? Why don't I wake up every morning with a desire to connect with God, at least half as strong as my desire for that first cup of coffee."

Many of us can go long periods of time without talking to God or even thinking of him. It can feel like a huge effort to maintain a habit of prayer.

Then there's those people we know who seem to have it altogether, they're happy. They have a good job and a great family. And God is not part of the picture. Where's their need?

Even these people struggle with feelings of aloneness at times. All of us struggle in the silence of our lives; struggle with facing ourselves when our distractions are being charged up (our phones, our tablets).

I want to address these questions by turning to the story of Abraham. Abraham is the patriarch of three of the world's major religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

When we first hear of Abraham in Genesis, we learn he and his wife Sarah have no children. That can be a burden for any couple, but in the culture of their time, it was a huge problem socially and economically. And both are elderly so the situation seems hopeless.

God chooses to begin a close relationship with Abraham. He says to him:

12... "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great,..."

Genesis 12: 1-2

If Abraham steps out in faith, God makes three promises: God will make of him a nation. God will make him great. God will bless him.

None of this could happen without a son. So Abraham goes. He leaves the comfort of his home and risks everything for what he wants most.

Maybe that's your story. Maybe you're here in church today not because you want a deeper relationship with God, but because you want something from him. It could be about your job, your child, your husband, your health.

Now here's what we need to know about our God – he accepts us however and whenever we turn to him. He is waiting for us to come to him. He is waiting to embrace us.

And so Abraham steps out in faith but he lessens his risk by taking his nephew just in case he really doesn't get that son.

Abraham is our father in faith, but he's not perfect. He and Sarah both doubted God. Both had to grow in their faith and their trust in God's remarkable promises. And that in itself is encouraging! We don't have to wait for perfect faith to turn to God. He is always waiting for us.

Even though the promised blessings are delayed by many years, Abraham steadily grows in faith and is given a son, Isaac. This will also bring to him God's greatest challenge: God says to Abraham:

²...*"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering..."*

Genesis 22: 2

Shocking for sure, but not as shocking as when we learn that Abraham actually sets out to do it! The story is showing us how Abraham's faith has grown. When they get to the place for the sacrifice, Isaac asks his father:

⁷...*"The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"* ⁸ Abraham said, *"God himself will provide the lamb."*

Genesis 22: 7-8

Another indication of faith and trust – God will provide. And, as we saw today, God did provide a ram for the offering and Isaac is spared.

We see that through Abraham's needs, God draws him to a place of faith and trust, so much so that he stands today as the father in faith of most of the people on the planet.

And so, we have to ask ourselves, are we missing out on recognizing our need for God because we might be meeting it in some other way.

And are there times when the challenges of life redirect our need back to him. God can use challenging situations in our lives for ultimate good.

Often, when we're deprived of physical needs or are challenged with a health crisis; or at times of loss, that's when we find ourselves turning to God. And that's OK!

I have found that the times I've suffered the most were the times that defined my faith and trust in God; those times made me the person I am today; the person who can represent Christ to the many others that are suffering in their own lives.

GOD USES OUR NEEDINESS TO REACH US. I've been to Haiti enough times to see the great need in the people there. The people of Haiti don't have many of the distractions that we have here; distractions that draw us away from God, not toward him. They need God so much more than we do....or so we think.....

What they do have, that we often don't, is the knowledge of just how much they need God on a daily, sometimes hourly basis. This neediness is a gift to them. And our neediness can be a gift for us too, if we could only recognize it. Pride and distractions always get in the way.

I'm not saying that crushing poverty or sickness is a gift but rather it's a means for God to reach us; it's a means for us to reach out to him.

IN OUR NEED WE RECOGNIZE OUR DEPENDANCE ON THE ONE WHO LOVES US MOST; ON THE ONE WHO WILL NOT DISAPPOINT; ON THE ONE WHO REDEEMS US AND HEALS US.

I encourage you to do something this coming week, something that we can all do.

Begin and end each day with four words, "Lord, I need you." Just do this for next week. And say twice a day: "Lord, I need you". Let's practice right now, "Lord, I need you."

Do this at the start and the end of every day for the next week and let Fr Gary and I know if anything has changed for you. In just proclaiming those words, we are already recognizing our greatest need.

Knowing our needs and taking the time to meet them is not selfish. It is living in the reality that we are children of God.