



## **Fr. Matt's Musings**

### **March 17, 2017**

*This is the last of my reflections from my time as the rector of the Cathedral parish in Camden, NJ. Happy St. Patrick's Day!*

### **Cardboard**

Camden is one of the most challenged cities in our country. Consistently, it ranks as one of the most violent American cities. Unemployment, drugs, abandoned houses and murders capture the headlines. Homelessness is an ongoing issue. Before arriving here, cardboard was the commodity of packing, and my only thought of it was how best to break it down before disposing of it. Then, on August 5, 2008, I arrived at the cathedral and saw the number of homeless who slept in our parking lot, their only bed, the cardboard beneath them. At first, I had a hard time sleeping, realizing the disconnect between my secure home, comfortable bed and the vulnerability of those who spent the night outside my bedroom window.

After a few months, my guilt subsided. Each morning, the routine was the same. The day began for our staff to clear all the cardboard from our property, with its accompanying smells. My attitude moved from guilt to frustration and finally to anger. I began to resent the homeless outside of our home. The smell of urine, the sights of defecation and used needles were regularly seen on our property. Finally, I asked myself how had I changed so dramatically? From where had this newfound anger arisen? I concluded that this had less to do with the homeless and more to do with me. I realized my own homelessness.

In the Salesian tradition, humility is the virtue that defines our relationship with God. Creator, Redeemer, Lover, our only response to God's goodness and love for us is gratitude. From thanksgiving, Salesian humility moves to an honest assessment of our gifts, talents, weaknesses, sinfulness and an acceptance of ourselves before God. Francis de Sales once wrote to his good friend Jane de Chantal, who was experiencing great anxiety about her self-worth, "O, Jane, if only you could see yourself as God sees you, simply through the eyes of love."

True humility is gratitude to God and honest acceptance of ourselves as we are, who we are, in God's eyes. Cardboard is now that image for me for any experience of not being "at home" with myself. My homelessness is when I am uncomfortable about how I look, self-conscious about how I speak Spanish, reserved about speaking out on social issues or any moment when I allow my fears or over-inflated ego to rule. God asks simply that we be who we are and be that exceedingly well (St. Francis de Sales).

### **Salesian Offering**

Tomorrow, Saturday, March 18th is the annual Salesian day of reflection, Live Jesus,

which takes place at St. John Neumann parish in Reston. Please come out for a morning of prayer and reflection. Fr. Frank Danella, a former OLGc pastor, and I will be the two presenters, and our provincial, Fr. Jim Greenfield, will be the homilist for Mass.

Live Jesus!

*Fr. Matt*

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