

Recently a house in the neighborhood was broken into. As the burglar was taking the large flat-screen TV off the wall, a voice was heard saying, “Jesus is watching you”. “Who’s that?” the burglar asked. Again, the voice spoke, “Jesus is watching you”. The burglar looked around the room and saw a parrot in a cage. He said to the parrot, “Is that you talking to me.” Again the parrot spoke, “Jesus is watching you”; then said, “My name is Moses”. The burglar laughed and said, “That’s crazy! What kind of people would name their parrot, Moses?” The parrot replied, “The same kind that would name their 175 pound Rottweiler, “Jesus”.

That kind of leads us into this morning’s reflection on Facing Rejection.

The late comedian Rodney Dangerfield made a rather handsome living with the phrase, “I don’t get no respect.” Adjusting his tie, he would say things like, “As a kid all I knew was rejection. My yo-yo never came back; my dog didn’t even respect me. He’d keep barking at the front door, not to go out, he wanted me to leave; I asked my Dad if I could go ice-skating on the lake and he told me, “Wait until it get warmer”; once, when I was lost, I asked a policeman to help me find my parents. After a couple of hours, I asked him, “Do you think we’ll ever find them”. He said, “I don’t know Kid. There are so many places for them to hide.”

Things didn’t even get better for him, Rodney said, as he got older. His bank told him if he would close his account, they’d give him a free toaster. He said once he called the suicide prevention hotline, and the guy tried to talk him into going through with it.

Rodney Dangerfield made fun of one of the greatest fears and deepest hurts that most of us have experienced, even from our childhood—the pain of rejection. Kids feel the sting of rejection on the playing field, sometimes in the classroom, and even interpret a “No” from a parent as rejection. Is there a Mother or a wife here who hasn’t felt taken for granted? Is there a Father or husband who hasn’t felt unappreciated? In this regard, I’ve learned a great bit of wisdom for husbands. In an argument with you wife, it is a good idea to always let her have the last word. Because the next word you speak, will lead to the next argument.

Tweens, Teens, and Young Unmarried are especially susceptible to feelings of rejection because acceptance by their peers is so important to them. A zit on the face becomes a major catastrophe because of the fear of rejection. The right clothes, the brand of sneaker, the hair-do or the haircut become obsessions because of the fear of rejection.

The truth is that some forms of rejection or disrespect are engrained in our society. For instance, when we under-value the work of women by paying them only 77 cents for the same work that we pay a man a dollar, that is a form of rejection or disrespect. When we pay our teachers less than we pay the people who collect our trash, that is a form of

rejection or disrespect. When we avoid people of a different race or religion, or some way in which we classify them as “other”, that is a form of rejection or disrespect.

In our first reading today we hear God calling Jeremiah to be a prophet. What is missing in our text today is Jeremiah’s complaint to God. In verse 6, Jeremiah says, “Ah, Lord God! I know not how to speak; I am too young.” Jeremiah argues with God that he knows, and is afraid, that he will be rejected because of his youth.”

In verses 7 and 8, God replies, “Say not, ‘I am too young.’ To whom ever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak. Have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

That’s the first thing to remember when we experience rejection. Remember who we are and remember whose we are. If we are rejected on the job, in the classroom, on the playing field, or in our own home, for doing or saying the right thing, hear the Lord speak to you, “Have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you.”

Sometimes rejection comes with the job. For instance, I still have people in the parish who refuse to speak to me, or actually snub me, turning away from me because I had to make the very difficult decision, in consultation with his superiors and mine, to retire Fr. John at the age of 92. Their almost three years of rejection still hurts. But believing I made the right decision for both Fr. John and the parish, these words of the Lord, “Have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you,” gives me both comfort and peace.

Then, there is Jesus’ experience of rejection. At the very beginning of his ministry, as he began teaching, healing, and casting out demons, in Mark 3: 21, we read this bizarre statement, “When his family heard of this they came to take charge of him, saying, “He is out of his mind.” Imagine! Jesus’ own family wanted to take him and lock him up, saying he was crazy. Talk about rejection!

Then, there’s the episode in today’s Gospel text. Once again, he comes home to Nazareth. At first, because his people had heard about all the miracles he had performed, they were excited to see him and looked forward to his doing signs and wonders among them. After all, they were his family and friends, the kids he had played with and grown up with. Surely he would work his magic for them.

At first, when he read the passage from Isaiah describing the work of the Messiah, they were confused. Who’s he think he is? He’s nobody special. He’s the son of the carpenter, Joseph. Is he crazy? He’s telling us he’s the Messiah.

Jesus then lays out how Elijah and Elisha, the prophets of old, healed and cleansed only foreigners, not the children of Israel. In Mark 6, verse 5, we are told, “He could work no

miracle there...so much did their lack of faith distress him”. Infuriated that he wasn’t showing them the signs and wonders he had done elsewhere, St. Luke tells us, “The people in the synagogue...filled with fury...rose up, drove him out of town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong.” They wanted to kill him! Now, that’s rejection!

Why? Why such hate? Why such rejection? Jesus revealed his truest self to them. These people whom he loved so much, he wanted them to know him for who he really is. He trusted them and wanted them to love him for who he was. And they hated him for it. They hated him for seeming to make himself better than them. How it must have hurt him. He told them the truth about himself. He wanted them to love him as much as he loved them. And they wanted to kill him for it.

Most of us aren’t as trusting as Jesus. We refuse to reveal our truest self, even to those we love the most. We hide behind masks that we create for ourselves. Sometimes we create false images of ourselves because we think people will like these false images, rather than our real selves. We are so afraid of rejection. Why? Because we really don’t trust love. And, a lot of times, we don’t trust love, because we don’t love ourselves as we are. We lose sight of who we are and whose we are.

God created us in his own image and likeness. To Him, each of us is a perfect portrait of Himself. From the day we are born, He sees each of us as His masterpiece. The things we don’t like about ourselves, God loves. “Why”, you may ask, “am I so short or so tall; why do I have this big nose or big ears; why can’t I sing like Janeen or play the keyboard like Joanne; or be as good looking as Fr. Eschbach?” Because God made you as you are because you are beautiful in his sight. He has given you everything that he wants you to have, in your looks, your gifts, your talents, your abilities, to accomplish the work he sent you to do. The work that will glorify him. By way of examples, I can’t help thinking of Stevie Wonder, born blind, now virtually deaf, but still creating beautiful music; or our own Monk Angelo, with diabetes, heart disease, lost limb, with limited sight, still serving on Pastoral Council and singing in the choir.

When you come to accept and love yourself as you are; the way God accepts and loves you, then, you can come to trust that others will love you for yourself, just as you are. Once we come to love ourselves, we can begin to practice loving, even in the face of rejection.

St. Paul tells us today how to practice love. He tells us, “Love is patient; love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous; it is not inflated, it is not rude; it does not seek its own interests; it is not quick-tempered; it does not brood over injury; it does not rejoice over wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails”

When faced with rejection that crushes you, look at a crucifix—the ultimate rejection of love, the ultimate rejection of goodness, the ultimate rejection of truth, the ultimate rejection of righteousness—then remember the empty tomb of Easter morning. Love never fails!