

Before I get to this homily, there's something I have to say. I know this isn't "appropriate" or whatever, but I'm gonna' say it because I can't hold it in anymore.... I've been diagnosed with Irish Alzheimer's. That's right, Irish Alzheimer's. Now, Irish Alzheimer's is not the same as *regular* Alzheimer's – a very vicious form of dementia where you lose all memory – *Irish Alzheimer's* is when you forget everything **except your resentments**. Apparently it's more common than most of us are aware – maybe 30% of the population are afflicted yet go undiagnosed. When I was given this diagnosis I thought the doctors would suggest a pretty aggressive dose of revenge to cure it, y'know: bitterness, fury, anger, shouting and reviling, along with malice. But to my surprise what they prescribed were therapeutic exercises of compassion and forgiveness.

I must say, the treatment is hard. I mean, I'm expected to just move on and say, "Oh you hurt me more than you can ever know, but that's why they put erasers on pencils!" All this time I've been waiting for the universe to vindicate me and I just need to move on? This cure doesn't take to heart the effects of others' sin. I mean, if you accidentally push me out of a tree and I fall and break my arm, I can forgive you but it's my arm stuck in a sling!

I can relate to Elijah! Here he is, proves once and for all that the Lord is the only God to the Israelites who've gone off to worship idols, facing down hundreds of opponent prophets of Baal – *and what thanks does he get??* Queen Jezebel has sworn to kill him and the people won't protect him. He runs for his life and prays for death; he says, "This is enough, O Lord!" **Enough!** That's his prayer! How many times can my call to conversion be taken with offense? How many crises of children, work, and finances need to happen in a marriage before spouses take time to address their own relationship?

How many jobs can be stacked on top of me before I have no prayer life left? Yeah God, this is **enough!** Can't you see I'm broken?

One of the things the doctors keep telling me is that much of this stuff, Fr. Pachomius, is a matter of perspective. For the last few Sundays we've been going through The Bread of Life Discourse in John's Gospel. Recall that Jesus sign is multiplying a small amount of bread to feed thousands. And when everyone is done eating we're told they fill twelve baskets with its fragments. Christ took *brokenness* and made it what saved the lives of the lost and hungry. Worthy reception of the Eucharist that is broken and given for us must be received only once per year (although most of us go frequently). We're told by Church law to go to confession once a year in order to make worthy reception of that communion. Thus we see that *food for the journey to God* and *our peace with God* go hand-in-hand. We're like Elijah who needs to both let go of his frustration and to accept God's nourishment to go on.

But y'know, I like my disease – I like resentment. Grudges give a feeling of control, of power instead of brokenness. But that control doesn't give peace; it's a cancer. *What must I do?* I know I must go to the altar and say to the Father: "Lord, I'm going to give up this grudge to you. And I know that this will mean the Cross; that it will be painful to give up control. But I trust, Lord, that in starting to forgive and live through pain that you'll give me the peace that is more life-giving than any false-control." Pope Emeritus Benedict said: "Behind the term *peace*, the ancient Church heard the mystery of the Eucharist. Peace very soon became one of the names of the Eucharistic sacrament, for in it, after all, God comes to us, makes us free, and although we are sinners in his sight, takes us into his arms and gives himself to us. And by leading us into the communion of

his Body, into the same space as his love...he also gives us to each other as brothers and sisters. Eucharist is peace that comes from the Lord” (*Teaching and Learning the Love of God* 235-236).

Now, I don't want to make it's all bad, just throw a pity party for Father. With this disease, like any other, you have good days and bad days. Right after I was diagnosed, I was asked by the Director of Religious Education at the parish where I was to prep the second graders for First Confession. So I talked a little about the Sacrament of Reconciliation, let them voice questions or concerns, and we role played confession. A week later I got a stack of Thank You cards from the kids. I posted some of them on Facebook, one, because the children's pure faith moved me, but also less nobly, because the cards said stuff like, “*You're the best priest ever!*” (I mean, we've got a Gregory the Great, why not Pachomius the Best? Just saying.) Anyway, about a month later one of my classmates at MU was talking to me about seeing the children's cards. She's the daughter of a Methodist minister and her dad's nominally Catholic. In the time I'd known her it was clear religion and the expectations of her mother's congregation were a confusing pressure-cooker of belief and doubt, pushing her to rebellion and guilt. She commented that she saw that one girl wrote how she learned from my talk there's only one sin that God won't forgive: that is thinking God won't forgive you. My classmate said, at the point of tears: “You have no idea what that meant for me to read that.”

Brothers and sisters, if Irish Alzheimer's has taught me anything it's that we need not be victims of our diseases. We're afraid to forgive, to show compassion, to pour out charity, because well, deep down we're unsure if we're worthy of it ourselves. But here's

the news: none of us are worthy of it! That's not the point! The point is that Christ forgave us because that's the nature of authentic love – like all of nature, it abhors a vacuum, and divine love flows like water to the broken cracks to restore life. Being broken won't be a problem if as Christ's Body we are then conformed more closely into the image of Jesus. All this is possible because we're fed by the flesh of the One who is the medicine of immortality.