



Fourth Sunday of Easter
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Pastor's Column

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There Are Not Enough Jars and Buttons

(I wrote this reflection a number of years ago, but I wanted to share it again during this Jubilee Year of Mercy.)

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. Indeed God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

—John 3: 16-17

Each year in parish life as children (and their parents) begin the process of preparation for the celebration of First Reconciliation and First Eucharist, I am taken back to my childhood and my “getting ready” for my First Confession as it was called back then in 1957.

In preparation for my first confession, I began thinking about some practical ways in which I could remember my sins so that I could tell them to the priest accurately in terms of kind and number. From somewhere, I got the idea that I would use my mother's mason jars (that she used for canning...does anyone still can?) and her buttons (she had a plenitude in her sewing basket).

The plan was simple, so I thought. I would have a jar, in my chest of drawers in my bedroom, for each sin that I would commit. I would then place a button in the jar for each time that I committed that specific sin. This seemed to be a foolproof way of keeping in good stead with God!

Very quickly, much to my amazement, I ran out of jars and out of buttons! I was overwhelmed. I could not keep track, that is, I could not itemize and record in a logical way the sinful actions of my life. And I was only 9 years old! My life was not yet very complicated.

At that moment, I quietly returned the jars and buttons to my mother. I, unconsciously, surrendered to God in a sense of grand wonderment that I would not be able to be “in control” in terms of my relationship with God.

It took some years to put into words, but I then, at that young age, allowed God to be God and allowed me to be me. I knew that God loved me in my strengths and in my weaknesses. I needed simply to accept that. I needed to surrender and to allow God to love me. I needed to just allow myself to examine my life in God's light, to sincerely express my sorrow and to keep attempting to do better, knowing that God's patience never runs out.

This child-like gift of faith has been with me my entire life. I have always taken God “with me” into virtue and into vice. God knows me! I can't hide my life from God. In my weakness, in my sin, I continue to ask God for forgiveness and then, once again, continue my attempts to change attitudes and behavior; to let go of what it is I need to let go and to grab hold of what it is I need to hold. My faith tells me that God's patience never runs out. As I continue to surrender to God and allow God to love me, I experience God's grace and power to help me, little by little, in my growing into holiness (wholeness).

I give thanks to God that, so early in life, I learned that there are not enough jars and buttons.

Just surrender!

There is nothing we can do to make God love us more.

There is nothing we can do to make God love us less.

F. Mike