

Feb. 12, 2017

The joy of making mistakes

Dear Children of the Catholic Diocese of Dodge City,

I hope your school year is going well! Remember, spring is just around the corner. March 20 is the spring equinox, the first day of spring! That's just a little more than a month away!

What is "equinox" you ask? Equinox is Latin for "something a horse would eat". In the early days, Greek villagers knew it was spring when their horses were able to nibble on the ox plant. In winter, the horses were unable to do so because it would make their lips cold and cause brain freeze. That's why in Greece, the first day of winter is known as *equinotnox*.

But that's not what I want to talk to you about. I want to talk to you about failure. Don't worry, this is not going to be depressing. Not very, anyway.

One day in the 1980s, I decided to walk across America. I planned for months, determining the best route, what food to bring, the supplies I would need, etc.... Finally came the day to begin. I stepped off my folks' front porch and into adventure.

I took one step after another, marching determinedly down the street with a heavy pack on my back, my folks waving from their porch until I disappeared over a hill. The sun beat down on me. The pavement seemed to become harder with each step. I drank all my water and wondered when and where I would be able to refill my canteen. My mouth was dry, my legs ached.

Eventually, children, the effort proved too much. I was forced to make a difficult decision. I found a telephone booth (a booth that contained a telephone), and reluctantly called my dad. Eventually I saw our old Plymouth Fury III come driving around the bend. I didn't make it across America, children, in fact I didn't even make it to the end of my street, but I felt proud for having tried. I remember sitting down with my dad, who shared these words with me -- words I will never, ever forget: "We're having lasagna for supper."

Lasagna. It doesn't get any better than that.

You see, children, Yoda was wrong when he said, "Do or do not. There is no try." In fact, next time you watch "Return of the Jedi," and you hear Yoda say these words, I want you to stand up and shout at the TV as loudly as you possibly can, "THERE IS 'TRY', YOU SILLY GREEN FREAK!" Okay? Can you do that?

There is "try," because if you don't try, you won't take the risk of failing. And failing can be a wonderful thing, that is, if we learn from our failure!

A few months ago I tried to replace the faucet in my kitchen. You might have read about it in the newspaper: "Flooding, riots, disease, pestilence, and presidential election results traced back to Spearville man's poor plumbing skills."

But, children, if I hadn't failed in trying to put in a kitchen faucet, I would never have learned the first lesson of plumbing:

... Um.... I should have written it down.

The fact is, children, trying and failing is just one more step toward success. There is no one you see at the store, at church, in your home, at your school, on your street, on movies, on television, teaching at your school, hiding in

your attic, or creeping around under your house who hasn't failed at something. I mean, really, really failed. *Bombed. Committed a major stinkarooni.* Each and every human on earth has had that experience.

Failure isn't only about making mistakes, children, sometimes it's about making the wrong choices. Sometimes making the wrong choice only hurts ourselves, but sometimes it hurts others. I don't want to put too much pressure on you at your young age, but it's important for you to know that making the wrong choices early in life can lead to gum disease, hair loss, and the inability to digest Mexican food without the help of prescription medication.

Wait I said earlier that failure can be a good thing. How is it a good thing to hurt others? Well, even these mistakes can make us better people, if we let them. And if we approach the person we hurt with honest regret and sincere apology, it can strengthen our relationship with that person. As you learned on your first day of the second grade, one of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous is to make amends to those we've hurt. That means telling them how sorry you are.

Children, another movie that came out many years ago contained the line, "Love means never having to say you're sorry." Don't ever forget this line, children. Don't ever forget that it's a total load horse poop. Love means just the opposite! We will always make mistakes, and we must be ready to say we're sorry. Sometimes a whole bunch of times. Even if I've already said it a thousand times and I really do feel super bad for breaking her favorite Hummel figurine because I was trying to juggle three oranges and one got away. Even then, you say it one more time.

The Catholic Church knows this to be true! That's why it has confession!

The important thing is, don't ever give up on yourself. Keep moving forward! God is always cheering you on, even when you fail. What if the quarterback went home the first time he fumbled? Or the cheerleaders stopped cheering?

I promise you, God is going to stick around for your entire life, even when you fumble, even when it goes into overtime.