Faith Formation Files: Vol. 2, Issue 7 November 10, 2019

I had a favorite professor when I attended Central Michigan University. I took every single class she taught, and I applied myself to the work in those classes like nothing I’d ever done before in my life. I remember once working on a final project for one of her classes, probably a Children’s Lit class. I had worked days and weeks on my research. I had spent countless hours typing, editing, and retyping my project. I recall the paper having close to 75 pages all together. And I recall that this work was done on my very first word processor. Now for those of you young enough to have always known only computers, a word processor was a cross between an electric typewriter and a computer. It was a stepping stone device. It had the capacity for smooth typing like on a keyboard, but instead of the full document showing on a screen, I could only see four lines of text at a time. There were no graphics. But among the top of the line features was automatic erasing. (You didn’t wait to print when you were completely finished; you printed as you typed, but it recalled the text and could “untype” it as quickly as it had just printed it.) Related to this feature was the technology of memory. The computer portion of the device could store and recall an entire document and even pull it up again if the machine had been turned off. I’m sure there are some of you who are rolling on the floor imagining that this technology was “cutting edge.” There are others of you who are reading this who recall this advancement and even the prior ones like changing from manual to electric typewriters. (Just like our faith journeys, we are all at different places in what we have done and seen in this life.)

Anyway, it was the night before my final paper was due. I had gone above and beyond in every possible way. I had used more resources than required. I’d supplied ample reasoning and examples in my work. I had appendices and a bibliography. This was a compilation of my best work ever! And as I went to print the final product…POOF! It was gone! I remember my confusion, my disbelief, my all-encompassing fear! I tried everything I could think of to try to retrieve the document. (There really weren’t that many options. This was very simple technology.) I looked in other files. I looked in the trash. There were no earlier versions of it saved somewhere in the memory that I could find. I turned that processor on and off about a hundred times! All of it was for nothing. My work was gone.

That was an absolutely horrible night as I tried to recreate my months of hard work. Between my anger and exhaustion, my new final project was far less than my original. I went to class with what little I had. I stayed after and spoke to the professor about what had happened. Because we had conferenced many times over the semester regarding the project, she knew that I had worked on it. She had even proofed some of the earlier versions. She took pity on me and let me have a couple more days to work on it and allowed me to present it to her orally so that I didn’t have to recreate the entire project again. She was merciful!

And so is God. Through our baptism and the receiving of the other sacraments, we are given sanctifying grace. This is God’s very life in our soul. This is what we need to get to heaven. Mortal sin is like the virus that gets into the computer and corrupts the files. Just as you can lose entire documents and projects with just a click of the wrong key, so do we lose grace when we sin, when we choose our way over God’s way, when we separate ourselves from Him and choose eternal death over life. But, God is merciful! He gives us countless opportunities to turn back to Him. He wants the very best for us. That’s not always a life of ease, riches, or freedom from suffering though. Sometimes we go through trials that are seemingly overwhelming. Those are times when we need to give it all to God and to trust in His timing. Protect the “files of your life” by “updating” your sanctifying grace. Go to confession. Receive the Holy Eucharist. Get anointed if you are sick. Use your gifts that were given upon Baptism and strengthened at your Confirmation to share God’s presence through your words and actions. The more you work at being good, the easier it is to choose God’s way. The harder you work to avoid sin, the stronger you will become in fighting its temptation. And just as quickly and easily as my work was gone, so may your entry into Heaven be upon your leaving this earthly dwelling since you will be filled with sanctifying grace!

Join us in Fellowship Hall right after the 11 am Mass in Howard City. We, again, have something for everyone including snacks and childcare. During this week, make sure to take time to get some work done in your A Family of Faith books. Next week, November 17th, class begins with a potluck. Families will be together working on their lessons and journey board. Please bring your materials to share with the group.

Blessings,

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