

HOMILY ON HOPE
St. John's
11/13/94

Every newspaper or every day brings us bad news. Can't think of much worse news than the item of a couple weeks ago about the woman who actually sold her two children and then lied about it. But I guess a close second to that for me would be an item which didn't have the first page in the newspaper, but it was in an inside page and it was about two teenagers in a Midwest town. Ninth graders, 13 years old, in the same week both of them committed suicide. This is a phenomenon of our time which is not only a devastating event for all the kids who are involved and who subsequently need all sorts of counseling, but it is a devastating event for us who say why. Here is the promise of the future. Look at the potential of these kids and here they are saying "It's not worth it anymore." That must be what happens. It is called the loss of hope. It is called despair. What's the use, I can't make it, I can't hack it, I'm not good enough, I'm a loser. The whole thing is not worth it. I could continue on with phrases that would describe that sense that I'm in the pits and there is nothing that is going to get me up out of those pits. Depression is a pretty common event and happening in our time. Psychiatrists and psychiatric counselors make millions of dollars every year trying to help people to come up from that pit of despair and to deal with life, to cope with life again. The pharmaceutical industry does the same thing. Incidentally, when I talk about depression today, lose of hope, I'm not talking about the kind of depression that is related to physical imbalance, chemical imbalance in the person. That is a different ball game. If that is what is happening to you and you have no idea why you are depressed, but you are deep down in the depths and you don't know how to handle it, please see a doctor. More often than not it is a relatively simple medication which will at least stabilize you to the point that it can be dealt with. Let's put that aside.

That other kind of depression that involves the diminution of hope that sees us fall into a malaise which says I can't hack it. Question and I ask for a show of hands. How many people in this church have been in one or more life situations in which have you have been right at the bottom of the barrel and you had no idea how to get out? Hands. A lot of people. A lot of people didn't raise their hands either who have had it. It is a pretty common phenomenon. It is

scary. Sometimes it brings those thoughts about "Hey, wouldn't it be better to end it all?" To be or not to be, that is the question. Whether it is nobler to bear the slings and arrows or to end them. The thing that we need to recognize, November is kind of a depressive month anyway, not for me so far, I've played golf twice already. Usually it is a pretty depressing month. Everything is gray and the leaves are off of the trees and we've got the wonderful Rochester winter to look forward to. Apart from that there are lots of things in life that are very depressing. Very difficult to handle. I remember when I first went to St. Louis, I went to get my hair cut up there in Pittsford and that is always kind of scary. You don't know what that new barber is going to do. The guy sitting next to me was a man 52 years old who had just been let go from a large corporation in the euphemism of today "downsizing". So here is was 52 years old. A huge mortgage, a large home, no job, no prospect of a job, kids. Look at the number of alcoholics and drug addicts who are saying "I can't do it. I can't overcome it. It's over." I bet there are a number of people right here who in the past year or so or maybe five years have lost someone so year you just can't get over it. I know my brother lost his wife a year ago the first of October. He just has not gotten over it. There is that tremendous depression that pulls you down that says "Is this whole thing worth it?" Now brothers and sisters I am simply proposing to you today that the Christian life says yes. The word is out. Yes it is worth it. Yes you can overcome your depression and your despair. Why? I honestly believe that the principle message of the word may flesh, Jesus Christ, came down and took all this junk that we take, lived in it, emersed himself in it and then took the fullness of it in his being rejected and despised and crucified and in his dying. He cried out in his las moments "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Are those the words of despair? What happened? His God reached down and raised him up and gave him a name above every other name, Jesus Christ is risen and glorified. The message is not for just Jesus, but for us that in our deepest moments of despair. In our deepest sense of not having meaning or worth or anything, that this God of ours reaches down in Jesus and says I can lift you up. We must not let go of that. Jesus is the pioneer of our salvation. That is what He called the scripture. I don't know what that Greek word for pioneer of salvation was. I could fake it if I wanted to. Pioneer of our salvation. Do you know what that means? That means it

has to be a story. Here is this rather frail sailing vessel. It is on a stormy sea; it is being rocked and rolled and tossed and turned and comes upon this reef and it began to hit against the reef and the boards begin to break up and begins to take on water and obviously is going to sink. And all the people on it are going to be drowned. Then there is this person who takes a rope from the bow of the ship and swims to shore and ties the rope to a tree and then one by one the passengers come along that rope. He is the pioneer of salvation. He is the pioneer of our hope when we are desperate when our ship is sinking and there is nothing to hold on to. He has given us the rope of his grace, the rope of his spirit. Hang on. Brothers and sisters, teenagers, there are going to be times when you think you are worth nothing. We know you are. We love you. But more important the Lord Jesus loves you. Grab on to that rope when the ship is sinking because life is worth living .

We've got to lighten up a little. This is the end of the homily. It is a calculated risk because I'm going to do a little singing and somebody said "Father, if I were you I wouldn't give up your other job." A lot of it I can't sing so I'll read that and then there is this one verse I hope I can, Father Kennedy said at the last mass "Lou, you had three different tee signatures and none of them worked." We'll try it anyway. What have we got to lose? This song is written in 1959, sung by Frank Sinatra and won an Academy Award. So help me sing at least a part of the chorus, okay?

"Next time your found with your chin on the ground, there is a lot to be learned, so look around. When troubles call and your back's to the wall, there's a lot to be learned, that wall could fall. Just what makes that little old ant think he can move rubber tree plant. Anyone knows an ant can't move a rubber tree plant. For he has high hopes, he has high hopes, he's got high apple pie in the sky hopes. So any time you're getting low instead of letting go, just remember that ant. Whoops there goes another rubber tree plant. Once there was silly old ram thought he'd punch a hole in the dam. No one could make that ram scam. He kept butting that dam, cause he had high hopes. He had high hopes. He had high apple pie in the sky hopes. So any time you're feeling bad, instead of feeling sad just remember that ram. Whoops there goes a million kilowatt dam. So keep your high hopes, keep your high hopes, keep your high apple pie

in the sky hopes. A problem's just a toy balloon, they'll be bursting soon. They're just bound to go pop. Whoops there goes another problem kerplop."

Brothers and sisters, this is not playing. We are not ants and we are not rams, but we have our Jesus Christ who makes it all worth while and he is our high hopes. Have high hopes especially when you are down. Then may the God of hope be with you. Amen.