

KEEP YOUR COMPASS HANDY

Though this sermon is for our Confirmands, I'm happy to let ALL of you listen. When I was still in high school, a senior I think, the man who would, 4 years later, become my father-in-law, a man I REALLY wanted to IMPRESS in those days, invited me to go DEER hunting with him. Now I'd been PHEASANT hunting with my OWN father several years before that, but I'd NEVER gone DEER hunting. Everything IN me wanted to say: *I can't go DEER hunting! I can't kill BAMBI! And YOU shouldn't EITHER!* But AS I said, I wanted to IMPRESS this man. SO, I said to him: *SURE, I'd LOVE to go deer hunting with you! THAT will be FUN!*

Well, a few days later, we drove DEEP into the woods of Vermont on an old dirt road. To call it BUMPY would be a COMPLIMENT. And THEN, he pulled his truck off to the side and we got out and walked into the woods with our rifles, maybe a mile or so. Now, I KNEW that he really didn't LIKE me yet, OR trust me with his daughter, so I couldn't help but wonder if he REALLY wanted to go DEER hunting, OR if he had some OTHER agenda in mind. But, what a STUPID thought THAT was, so I put it out of my head. And THEN, we came to the SPOT he was looking for, HIS spot, and he handed me a brass COMPASS, and said: *I'll stay here, and I want you to USE this compass and walk in a BIG circle. Hopefully you'll stir up some DEER and send them MY way, on this DEER run, and we'll get us a DEER today, OK?*

I said: *OK*, and I started walking. BUT, I had never really USED a compass before. Oh, I had LEARNED in second or third grade what we ALL learn in second or third grade: that the compass NEEDLE always points NORTH. But that's ALL I knew. SO, when I took out the compass, after I'd walked maybe another mile or so, NORTH seemed like it was in the opposite direction of where I'd just COME from. But I'd already started to make a CIRCLE, so I wasn't SURE whether I was supposed to be going NORTH, or SOUTH, or EAST or WEST. And I thought: *What GOOD is this COMPASS? What good is it to know which way NORTH is if you don't know which way you're SUPPOSED to GO?* You see: I didn't LOOK at the compass before I started, so I had no CLUE which direction I'd COME from, or WHERE I was GOING. And AS I look BACK at it NOW, I can UNDERSTAND how the Hebrew people could spend 40 YEARS wandering in the WILDERNESS after their EXODUS out of Egypt. The WILDERNESS in the Sinai Peninsula is nothing but DESERT, where the sand DUNES keep SHIFTING with the WINDS of the day, and where it ALL looks the SAME because it's ALL rocks and sand.

And I found out that day that I have a PHOBIA that I never knew I had. I am SCARED to death of getting LOST, especially in the WOODS. In fact, my wife will TELL you that I absolutely PANIC in the woods if I think we're LOST. And I can UNDERSTAND how, every time things got TOUGH for the HEBREW people, they'd say: *TAKE us BACK to Egypt! Yes, we were SLAVES there, but at LEAST we had FOOD and WATER.* Well, shortly after I began to PANIC that day, I saw several DEER, beauties, right in FRONT of me. And NOT that I could have shot Bambi anyway, but I was in such a PANIC, that I was absolutely PARALYZED. I couldn't BEGIN to think about SHOOTING at a DEER, even though I had a FABULOUS shot! Well, AFTER those deer moved ON, I decided that MAYBE, if I **shot** my rifle into the AIR a few times, my someday father-in-law would come FIND me. So I DID, but he DIDN'T. SO, I kept WALKING for what seemed like HOURS. And as I walked, I kept PREPARING myself for a WEEK of starvation and a slow DEATH under a pine tree.

But THEN, all of a sudden, I came to a ROAD, a DIRT road, just as bumpy as the one we came IN on. And I started WALKING down that road. And don't you KNOW that, pretty soon, I came to my

someday father-in-law's TRUCK, but HE was still in the WOODS. Well, there was no WAY that I was going back into those woods AGAIN, so I sat there HIDING in the bushes along the path that we'd first gone IN on, WAITING for him to EMERGE. And WHEN he DID, I waited another 5 minutes, and then I walked OUT. *What are doing HERE?* I said. *I moved some DEER right toward you, and you'd already left your POST.* He said: *Well, it seemed to take you an awfully LONG time, so I got nervous and decided to come back HERE. SORRY about that.* And that was the END of it. I looked good, and SO did HE. And when we got home, we BOTH claimed to have had a WONDERFUL day. And nobody has ever known the REAL story until NOW. I had the COMPASS, you see, but I DIDN'T know how to USE it.

Well, TODAY is CONFIRMATION Sunday! And your IN Confirmation Class this year, you 10 Confirmands have been SHOWN our COMPASS, and been taught a LITTLE bit about how to USE it. You see: when it comes to LIFE and living and fullness of life, it's a pretty SCAREY and difficult world out there. You, Confirmands, may not KNOW it yet, because you're pretty YOUNG and protected, but you WILL learn it, for we all DO. And I'll tell you: it's EASY to get LOST in this world, JUST like it is in the WOODS if you don't have a COMPASS, or even if you DO and DON'T know how to USE it.... BUT, for centuries and centuries, people have found a COMPASS in what YOU have been LEARNING this year: in the BIBLE, in the CHURCH and its traditions, and in coming regularly to WORSHIP! Yes, THAT'S our COMPASS, and it's been PASSED down to YOU from generations of people who have come BEFORE you, and found MEANING and STRENGTH, JOY and FULLNESS of life IN and through the CHURCH of Jesus Christ. A COLLEAGUE of mine was talking just last week about how, on the CEILING of her church in New Jersey, there's a HUGE inlaid rose COMPASS, carved out of WOOD. And that COMPASS has been ON that church's ceiling for over 200 years. You see: those who CARVED it, and MOUNTED it there, DID so in order to REMIND people, week after week, and generation after generation, that it is IN the church, and its SCRIPTURE and TRADITIONS, and in regularly worshipping GOD, that we find our COMPASS, that we FIND the DIRECTION, MEANING, PURPOSE that we need for LIFE and FULLNESS of life in this DIFFICULT and often SCAREY world.

Yes, Confirmands, YOU have been given the COMPASS! AND, you have been given a START on knowing how to USE it. And it's IMPORTANT that you KEEP using it, and KEEP learning how to use it more EFFECTIVELY. You need to KNOW that today isn't the END of your LEARNING about your FAITH and its values, but just the BEGINNING. Jesus, in His *Sermon of the Mount*, talks about TWO ways of living our lives: GOD'S way and every OTHER way, the WORLD'S way. And He's URGING people to live by GOD'S way, by GOD'S values, because it's like building your house on foundation of ROCK, instead of a foundation of SAND. And ON that ROCK, your HOUSE will STAND through THICK and THIN! And THAT'S the SAME thing MOSES is telling the HEBREWS in our OTHER Scripture Lesson, as THEY prepare to enter the PROMISE land. To have LIFE in ALL its fullness and joy, they must KEEP their FOCUS on GOD'S way, GOD'S values! *WRITE it on your doorposts!* he says. *Hang it on your ARMS! TIE it to your FOREHEADS!* In OTHER words, DO whatever it TAKES to keep you FOCUS on the WAYS and VALUES of God, which are NOT easy. READ the *Sermon on the Mount* in Matthew, chapters 5-7, and SEE how HARD it IS to live by GOD'S way in a world that lives so DIFFERENTLY. But we MUST, IF we want to have LIFE in ALL its fullness, AS Jesus promised! So, USE the compass you've been GIVEN, my young friends, and you will NOT get LOST in this world, at least not for long. And to help you remember that, I'm giving you a GIFT today, a COMPASS! God bless EACH of you on your JOURNEY. Amen.