

Good morning.

I'm the "warm up" speaker. Or I guess you could call me the "warm up" act. I'm told I'm supposed to warm you up for Confession.

When I was going to school in Ohio at Franciscan University back about 4 years ago, there was an old friar. Now, you know what a friar is? Brown or black robe ... rope belt ... sandals. Everybody got a picture? Good. Forget it.

Now imagine Yoda. But not green ... just Irish. You laugh ... but I'm not kidding.

When I was studying at Franciscan University, my spiritual director was Fr. Gus Donegal. Fr. Gus was much beloved by everyone on campus. He was ... short. White hair. Mostly blind. Sometimes walked with a cane.

When Fr. Gus would walk around, people would gather around him. He was a great source of stories and was all-around entertaining. And in his own little Irish way, he would swat at students with his rope-belt ... sometimes swinging his cane playfully ... in a full circle and laugh watching the students scatter.

Legend has it, that one Ash Wednesday at Franciscan University, that Fr. Gus was the homilist at Mass ... the preacher. He made his way cane and all up to the pulpit ... and literally climbed up to the ambo.

Peering out over the crowd he stared ... and he stared ... and he stared. And when he opened his mouth, out of this little, sweet, old Irishman came a cry at the top of his lungs ... REPENT!

And then he looked over the gathered congregation of students ... stared at them ... and came down from the pulpit ... and made his way back to his seat.

You may be laughing, but this is serious stuff.

The first words we hear on the first Sunday of Lent are when Jesus comes out of the desert after forty days and being tempted by the devil ... and Jesus says:

*"This is the time of fulfillment.
The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel."*

Now, 'repent' is not a word we use every day. We may use the word 'toast' ... "honey can I have some toast" ... or 'blackberry' ... "my blackberry went off in the middle of this guy's talk" ... or 'traffic' ... "the traffic was so bad at 8:00 am on Saturday, that I was almost late for the Men's Conference."

But somehow, "repent" does not usually enter into our daily vocabulary.

Just for the record, I want to point out that ‘repent’ is a six-letter word ... not a four-letter word.

But while we’re talking about words, let’s look into the roots of the word ‘repent.’

In the New Testament, ‘repent’ comes from the Greek word ‘metanoia’ which means to “change your mind,” or “change your heart.”

“Honey, I changed my mind ... I think we’re going to get a Corvette instead of a Mini-van.”

In the Old Testament, there are two words that are translated into the English word ‘repent.’ The first means to “sigh” or to “let go.” ... (Hhhhaaaaaahhhh) ...

I think we hear that, don’t we? “Daaaad! She won’t let go of the game controller!” and what is your response? ... (Hhhhaaaaaahhhh) ...

The other means to “turn back” or to “return.”

“Ooops, I missed my turn ... I’ve got to turn around somewhere.”

So, despite the fact that “repent” is not a word we daily use, I think that the meaning enters into our daily conversations quite often.

Next, does anyone like cowboy movies? Anyone ever been in the wild west? In 1994, I had the occasion to be in the wild west ... the wild west of China, known as Tibet.

And I’m not making this up. When I got out of the bus in Tibet ... after replacing logs on a log bridge over a huge crevasse, and walking over the bridge since the bus driver wasn’t sure the bus would make it over with all of us inside (and neither was I) ... there were men on horseback with knives and guns in their belts, wearing cowboy-like hats ... on dirt roads ... dust ... smoke.

It looked like a movie set for a western ... but it was real.

And, does anyone know what a “yak” is? It’s something like a cow or maybe a buffalo ... they’re native to Tibet and Mongolia ... it’s a lot like a buffalo with dreadlocks. Yeah, you’ve got the picture ... Bob Marley the cow.

Well, Tibet is completely at a very high elevation, and any wood they have goes for construction. But, yaks have to eat, and after they eat, well ... they ... um ... they make fuel.

Every fire in Tibet is made with a dried patty of yak ... droppings.

Every fire ... the fire that cooks your breakfast ... the fire that heats the water for your shower ... the fire that makes your tea ... the fire that heats the hotel ... every fire is yak dung.

And so, there’s a lot of yak-dung-ash.

So, after spending a week in a Tibetan village, I returned to the relative-civilization of Chengdu in Western China.

I stripped off my clothes, threw them on my bed, and made for the shower.

I must have taken the equivalent of 3 or 4 showers before the water stopped coming off of me grey. I felt like I had shed a second skin.

And when I walked into my room, there was this terrible smell ... like the floor of a cow barn ... everything I'd brought with me from Tibet had the pervading odor of ... yak dung.

So, now that I've woken you all up, and helped your morning appetite ... what does this all mean for us?

Living life in our world, we may not be slowly covered in a thin layer of yak dung, but we do get exposed to bad things. And sometimes these bad things become our own habits.

Living the Christian life in our modern world is often very counter-cultural.

And so, we tend to get coated in a thin layer of "world-li-ness" ... we aren't UN-affected by what goes on around us.

So, what do we do about that?

After I'm done talking, you all will have the opportunity for private confession.

I'd like you to think of confession as jumping into a shower ... to get rid of the soot of the world. Maybe you've already gone to confession this week. Go again.

After my trip to the Wild West, I had to shower a few times to get rid of the yak dung soot.

If "repent" sounds like something you're not quite sure how to do, then how about "change your mind?" "let go?" "turn around?"

Someone will shortly be up here to give you directions. But get in line, and let the Sacrament clean off the soot of sin ... think about where you maybe could change your mind to be more closely united to the mind of Christ ... let go of those things that keep you away from closer union with God ... and turn around to find your Loving God and Father waiting for you with open arms ...

So, my brothers, repent. Don't miss out on this opportunity to clean off the soot of the world. But don't be surprised that if you really, really dig deep and repent big-time ... that you may notice the things you left behind ... kinda smell bad. God bless you.

Go to confession!