

Last weekend, several of us friends from high school got together for our annual Labor Day weekend tradition of causing chaos and absolute nonsense on waterfronts. For years it had been on the Lake Erie shoreline, but this time we ventured to what's called Grand Lake St. Mary's (just west of Columbus). The problem is, about a decade ago, blue-green algae started to infiltrate the water system, and now the inland lake is about as green as our liturgical paraments. Not to mention if the wind blows just right, the smell will knock you into the next county over. Thousands upon thousands of fish have died, and it's just now showing some *minimal* signs of improvement.

But that obviously did not stop us from still spending time together by the not-most-perfect water we had ever seen. It just serves as a reminder that in the relatively miniscule fifteen years since our high school graduation, the waves of many of our lives have not been the most perfect calm serenity, to say the least. Two of this group have already lost their mothers to cancer. One has had a father suffer a stroke, and he will never be the same. And just last year, about this same time, one of the friends collapsed during a 5k run, and if it wasn't for people who immediately went into action with CPR, he

would have died right there and then. Now, if any of us were asked what we hoped and dreamed for in a ten-and-a-half-year timeframe after walking out with diploma in hand, none of that would ever be envisioned by the time we hit our 30's. Such spots in the far-reaching waters of life can certainly knock us off our feet, make us lose hope, and the deepest desire to just get out altogether.

Far too many of our sisters and brothers in Christ experience those feelings on a too-often daily basis: the exact same sisters and brothers in Christ as described in James. They don't wear nice enough clothes, they're not clean enough, they don't have enough money to be sophisticated enough. So, they, in turn, receive the bare minimum respect we feel we can give them for us to continue passing ourselves off as Christians. If they want more than that most basic respect, if they want a better seat at any table, if they want to be treasured and valued just like the rest of us; well, may God help them find the resources they need to be more like the rest of us.

Except, it was those same people who, long ago, built what is called Grand Lake St. Mary's, as a way to supply water to the immensely important Erie and Miami Canals, at the time. So, back in 1837, a group of seventeen

hundred men, mostly German and Irish immigrants, went to work with nothing more than shovels and axes. They were paid thirty cents a day to dig 17,500 acres. Eight years later, they had completed what was, then, the largest artificial body of water in the world with fifty-two miles' worth of shoreline.

Of course, as the decades passed, Grand Lake St. Mary's was no longer needed to help with any such canal system; so, it instead became a tourist attraction bringing in hundreds of thousands of people a year. Unfortunately, that has also taken a hit with the blue-green algae takeover. Nevertheless, over a century-and-a-half after its completion from poor not-so-perfectly dressed immigrants, several of us high school friends, who descended from such immigrants, still managed to find beauty there, in the same water that wasn't so perfect to the eyes.

And yet, it obviously didn't have to be a certain color of blue in order for us to share laughter in spite of the losses we felt far too young. It didn't have to be a magazine-cover picturesque beauty to still get us together and reaffirm our dedication to one another. It didn't have to be perfect for us not-

so-perfect children of God to realize all the good that still comes with not-so-perfect circumstances.

After all, we worship this God who goes to work every day, all the time, through completely imperfect children of the Divine. We worship this God who went to work with nothing more than a cross on the back to save the world. We worship this God who reels us in with the clearest of baptismal waters, but will unleash us into the places, into the lives, where the waters are the most impossible to see through at all. But the only thing that matters, is that God sees through the dirt and grime and sin and death; and still sees in each of us a purity that our eyes cannot possibly look straight into: because that Resurrection light shines far too brightly, still, in all of us; regardless of what we wear, regardless of how dirty we feel, regardless of what this life throws at us. This God not only went to work for us long ago in the deepest trench of death itself, but still manages to work in us and those around us on a daily basis without fail, and even promises to be there at the end, when the waves take us into the serenity of the Kingdom that is beyond anything we can ever imagine. And for that holy work that continues in each of us, and for eternity, we give thanks to God indeed! Amen.