

From The Pastor

Last week we reflected on the love of God and how it is revealed in the coming of God's Kingdom. We said that, in our human condition, the love of God seemed too good to be true. Human perception and experience is hesitant to fully trust and surrender itself to a love that seems too big, too much to handle. We said further, that God had toned down the divine love and revealed it in a way we could understand and take in. This is the gift of the Incarnation, the birth of the divine God in human flesh. Now, despite the resistance of many, the love of God is seen in the world through those who trust and experience the love of God, and witness it to others.

Similar to last week, we hear again today about how the Kingdom of God will make its presence known in the world. This time we see a different aspect of the same reality. With a closer look, it becomes apparent that the ways of God are, in fact, quite simple. The truth is, the ways of God are profoundly simple. If we were to trust them, and allow the way of God to form us, we would learn their peace and find their happiness.

According to St. Theresa of Avila, one of the most common hindrances in our prayer is that we presume God to be absent. More often than not, we come to depend too heavily on the feeling of God's presence. When the feeling of God is not full or active, we tend to presume that God is absent or not listening to us. This is not the case. The feeling of God is not God. God is not a feeling, but a person, an absolute reality and truth of love. To love God is to love Love, regardless of whatever feeling may accompany the experience.

The first reading today addresses this issue. God reveals his presence to the people through Moses. The people are instructed to not resist and complain that God is too far away or too hard to find. As a clear connection to the gospel, in anticipation of the great commandment, they are told that God is very near. 'It is something very near to you, already in your mouth and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out'.

God is within us. The fabric of the divine life is the fabric from which our lives have been made. We are, in human language, genetically predisposed to know God (Love) from the human heart. Resistance to love is a waste of time and good intelligence. But resist we do because we are finite creatures who have often enough been wounded by love. Our resistance to love is only our effort to avoid the pains, abuses, or simply the vulnerability and the demands of love.

This seems to be the stance of the lawyer who attempts to test Jesus in the gospel. In the end, he is the one to be tested. This lawyer fits our theme perfectly. We are told he is attempting to test Jesus. This implies he is a 'hostile witness'. However, in his attempt to test Jesus, he reveals a deep understanding of the truths of God. He rightly identifies the greatest of all the commandments: love God with your whole self, and love your neighbor as yourself.

On the one hand, this man is resisting Jesus, believing him to be a threat to following the true ways of God. On the other hand, the true way of God is in this man's heart if he would only allow it to form his life, rather than use it as a defense and resistance to action. He must have felt good about Jesus' affirmation of his answer. Yet, because he lives his faith in his head and not his heart, he feels he must justify what his good answer really means. To justify here really means to limit. In his head and law kind of faith, he will happily love his neighbor as long as it fits his way of thinking and believing.

At this point, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan. I suspect the lawyer and the crowd liked the story, they just didn't like (or understand) the punch line. The love of God and the love of neighbor are universal, having no boundaries. Now the lawyer is the one being tested. Can he accept this love and truth of God without limit and boundary according to his perception and expectation?

This is the question and tension we all face. It is the same question we faced last week. Can we allow God to love us deeply and personally, and in receiving this love from God, are we willing to become the face of God by loving others? This truth of God, in itself, is very simple. The answer to the Christian life will always be love. This simple truth of God is greatly resisted because it is equally demanding. We don't ask the lawyer's question about who my neighbor is, but we none-the-less tend to live within the boundaries of our comfort and self-expectation.

Experience is the best teacher in such a case. What is the most loving thing ever done for you in a time of need? Who was most a neighbor to you when you most needed it? (And the one you expected to help didn't?) How did this affect you? What is the most loving thing you did for another that really helped them? How did this affect you? In both these cases, the 'affect' is positive. When we are deeply helped, we feel loved, and grateful. When we generously serve another, we also feel the goodness of love and a similar gratitude for having acted as we did. This is the wisdom of Jesus' punch line: "do this and you will live".