

PARISH MISSION IS THIS WEEK

Do not miss this opportunity for spiritual growth and peace
Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings at 7:30 in Church
Father Art Cooney, Judy Troxell presenting, with Bill Richart on Music
'Peace with God, Self, and Others'
COME, AND BRING YOUR FRIENDS

From The Pastor

Nothing special is needed to begin a more personal relationship with Jesus. The gift of faith in Jesus and the Good News is not for the learned or for some privileged few. Jesus offered his word of salvation and mercy to the simple, and those most in need. Today's readings confirm that faith in Jesus is the path and promise to eternal life.

I am sure you can appreciate that there are many factors that can frustrate and inhibit a mature relationship with God. Very often we are unconscious of factors that influence how we think about God, yet it can be these very perceptions that hinder a more truthful and satisfying relationship with Jesus.

We all have an image of God, yet it is often unconscious, and rarely put into words. Do you think of God as lover, healer, creator, merciful, and all compassionate? Do you think of God in God's omnipotence, God's transcendence, or God's otherness? Do you think of God in Jesus as Savior and Lord, friend, brother, and companion who walks with you? Perhaps your image of God is more like judge, bookkeeper, authoritarian, or one who keeps score of faults and punishes them.

Our image of God often is formed very early in life. Our life experience, even from birth, plays a role in how our image of God is formed. Different things impress us at important times in life and become a part of how we think about God. What is important is whether we can grow and allow our image of God to change and mature as we move through life. Such growth can help correct an image of God that may have been poorly formed or unduly influenced at a painful time in life. God will always be more than we can imagine God to be. Our image of God will never be complete. Yet, our image of God should be consistent with our profession of faith and belief in a God of love and salvation.

An important factor in how we view God is how we view our self. Is my image of God consistent with my self-image? For instance, do I think of God as all loving, merciful, and compassionate, yet consistently think of myself as unworthy, undeserving, too sinful to be included in this goodness of God? Do you feel good about God only when you feel good about yourself? Are you always trying to prove yourself before God, but feeling as though you never quite make it? That you really want to know and feel God's love, but it seems as though you never quite get there?

A person with wounded self-esteem will often be very guarded in their stance before the Lord. Trust is a critical factor. If we have learned through harsh experience to mistrust life, persons, and relationships, it is very likely that we will project this mistrust onto God, making very difficult to accept the promise of God's love and goodness toward us.

Today's gospel is the essence of the Christian life. The essential message: eternal life is this, to have faith in Jesus whom the Father has sent. To be saved is to believe in the utter fullness of God's love given to the world in his Son. The familiar verse of John 3:16 makes this explicit: 'for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that all who believe in Him might not perish, but might have eternal life'. Faith and salvation have very much to do with believing in the love of God for all. We are familiar with these words, but is this our conviction in the light of personal pain, suffering, or sinfulness?

The gospel further expresses that God did not send the Son into the world to condemn sinners, but to save them. God is not about punishment and condemnation. God is about love and salvation, unity and forgiveness. Despite our wounds, our sinfulness, and all the things we really don't like about ourselves, can we still believe that God does not condemn us? The reading says the condemned are those who refuse to believe in the love of God revealed and given in Christ Jesus. Condemnation is the choice of those who reject love, and God's free offer of it.

The second reading supports this truth. St. Paul tells the Ephesians: 'by grace you have been saved through faith, it is not our doing, it is God's gift'.

Seems too good to be true, doesn't it? Perhaps, but our God is an Awesome God who only knows love. Condemnation is a human creation by our free choice. Love is truth. To accept and trust this truth is the best choice we can ever make.

Father John Esper