

15th Sunday of Ordinary Time “Love Must Look Like Something”

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If you listen to a priest on Sunday long enough, there are common themes you run into. Here we go again! The first letter of John chapter 4, verse 16, tells us that God is love. Genesis chapter 1, verses 26-27, says we are made in the image and likeness of that God who is love. What are we called to do then? Survey says? LOVE! The meaning of life, summarized by a single syllable word. Therefore, when a scholar of the law stands up before Jesus and says, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus tests him with, “you’re the scholar, you tell me?” The scholar responds wisely with an answer from his heart rather than from his mind. He responds with essentially a single worded answer, love! “Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus, impressed with this man’s answer, replied, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.”

Incidentally, one of our youngest doctors of the Church, St. Therese of Lisieux, while discerning what her vocation was in the Body of Christ in the face of terrible infirmity, came to this conclusion, “Love comprises all vocations, love is everything, love embraces all times and places, in a word, love is eternal”. After discovering this, Therese writes, “Then, in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: O Jesus, my love....my vocation, at last I have found it....My vocation is love!” Isn’t that nice? “My vocation is love”.

But now, my friends, our scholar of the law brings us crashing back down to earth again with the question, “who is my neighbor” which is the same thing as asking, who am I to love? Or better yet, what does this love look like anyway? Jesus then gives us one of his best known parables to describe to us what love looks like in the story of the Good Samaritan. A beat up, half dead stranger was lying on the side of a road. A priest sees this man and decides to walk on the other side of the road, a Levite (a man from a priestly class of Jews) sees this beat up, half dead stranger, and also walks on the other side of the road. A Samaritan sees this beat up, half dead stranger, and decides to take care of him.

This was a very scandalous ending for the ears that were listening to Jesus speak. Jesus was talking to a Jewish crowd. Samaritans were considered to be apostates or even atheists by these Jews. What was Jesus essentially saying? What he was saying is this: It is not enough to be a pious, religious person, saying your prayers and going to Church. If your love of God does not extend to love of neighbor, that apostate atheistic Samaritan who looks and talks differently than you will make it into heaven before you do. Get it? That is what Jesus was saying. What could this mean for us today?

I think what the Lord is saying here is very relevant for us today in how we treat one another as individuals and also how we as a society in general can assist those living on the margins. And these issues are hard as you know and there are no easy solutions. Whether it is the increasing number of people experiencing homelessness in our communities or how to best welcome immigrants who come to us in their time of need,

the list goes on, we don't have to look very far to find people on the side of the proverbial road looking for some compassion. And, I am the first to say that I do not have all the answers. However, I do believe that as followers of Jesus it is spiritually important that the story of the Good Samaritan be included in this conversation somehow, as controversial as that sounds.

You see, from my perspective, it is good to be reminded from time to time that loving God means we must love our neighbor, and this love must look like something. Love does not look like walking on the other side of the street averting our eyes pretending the problem does not exist. Love does not look like succumbing to prejudice or fear either. Love is work, and at times, very hard work. Don't get me wrong, this does not mean that we are necessarily called to give out handouts wherever we go, but it might mean that we have the moral courage to call first responders if someone is truly having an emergency or perhaps find a way to volunteer or support organizations that are professionally trained to provide assistance to people in their time of need like Catholic Community Services or St. Vincent de Paul, the list goes on.

Let's go back to the Little Flower. I find it remarkable that despite the terrible infirmity St. Therese of Lisieux suffered causing her to eventually die at such a young age, she nevertheless found the grace to embrace a vocation of love. She challenges us to do the same, to be love. Like I said at the beginning, God is love. We are made in the image and likeness of this God who is love. We are called to love. Once we embrace a vocation to do our best to be the love this world desperately needs like St. Therese, we discover that the road to sanctity is not about accomplishing grand enterprises, making historical achievements, or getting another degree. These are good things however the road to holiness is not about that but rather about the little things we do with love each day. Every little act of service done with love is a road to sainthood. It was this little way of Saint Therese of Lisieux that inspired Mother Teresa's definition of discipleship, doing little things with great love. This is a profound spiritual insight because Jesus says one thing loud and clear in our Gospel reading today: love, to be love, must look like something. Or like Deuteronomy intimates in our first reading, the Kingdom of God very, very near to us. So very near. It is already in our mouths and in our hearts. We have only to carry it out.