

16th Sun. Ord. Time (C)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
July 16, 17, 2016

TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART, ALL OUR SOUL, WITH ALL OUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL OUR MIND: we recognize this as the first and greatest commandment. Some here can recall a similar statement: TO KNOW LOVE AND SERVE GOD IN THIS LIFE, AND BE HAPPY WITH GOD IN THE NEXT: this was the answer you learned to the first Baltimore Catechism question “why did God make you”

TO LOVE GOD is basic to the spiritual life. Actually, it is basic to life in general. Life is not life without the spiritual dimension. Without the spiritual life, life is incomplete. Yet how to love God remains for many a great puzzle. HOW DOES ONE LOVE GOD? WHAT DOES LOVING GOD LOOK LIKE WHEN IT IS LIVED OUT?

Last weekend's gospel contained the two great commandments and gave a very concrete example of how to live out what loving another person is all about be neighbor to anyone in need. Go out of your way to be responsible for another and serve them, rather than going out of your way to AVOID them. That is how we love other people. We serve their needs. We do for them what they need. Obviously this doesn't work when it comes to loving God, for what does God need? In fact, the great early saint, St. Irenaeus is quoted as saying”God did not tell us to follow him because he needed our help, but because he knew that loving him would make us whole.” That is an amazing statement, one each of us could well spend some time with, especially the last part of it: “God knows that loving him will make us whole “ and may I add, “not loving God will tear us apart.”

Just as the story of the Good Samaritan gave us an example of how to love others, today's story of Martha and Mary gives us an example of how to love God. The trick with this week's story is to recognize who actually is the host and who actually are the guests. (Like in most Scripture, it is not who we might first think.) Martha, as we know, remained busy about many things – trying to play the good hostess, while Mary sits at the feet of Jesus and listens to Him. She is even praised for choosing the better part. Based on this, we might well think that Mary is the host. But because Scripture is not what we first think, Jesus is actually the host. Repeatedly in his gospel, Luke says of Jesus, “HE CAME TO SERVE, NOT TO BE SERVED.” Thus the way to love God is different from the way we love others. We love God not by doing things for God, but by letting God host and serve us.

In today's First Scripture the same twist in events happens. Abraham and Sarah are busy preparing a meal for the three strangers who show up at their tent. But it is the last words of that text that contain the point ... the messengers have come to announce Good News.

In a sense, the messengers are the 'hosts', and Abraham and Sarah the guests. Abraham and Sarah must stop their doing, and listen to what the messengers have to say.

The flow of salvation is from God to us. Remember, God does not need us, and we do not do any favors to God, by being good, by attending church, or even by praying. We have the direction all wrong. God is the Good News. God is the one who shares this Good News with us and we must be open to receive from God. Thus St. Paul in today's middle Scripture from Colossians states: "*God has willed to make known to us the glory beyond price which this mystery brings to us ...*" It is God who serves us and hosts us. WE love God more by giving our attention ... our whole mind, soul, and strength to God ... than by trying to do things for God. Again the words of St. Irenaeus, "God did not tell us to follow him because he needed our help, but because he knew that loving him would make us whole".

Doing things for God is not wrong. Jesus did not condemn Martha for her activity. But Jesus did indicate that Mary had chosen the better portion. If Sarah and Abraham had never listened to the messengers, they would have missed the Good News meant for them. And I am sure they certainly would have seen their pregnancy in old age as unbearable rather than as something in the plan of God.

Maybe we don't grow in God, because we don't listen enough to God. How often don't we say to one another, "If you had just listened." How often do you imagine God thinking that of us as well, "If you had just listened."

We love God by quietly being in God's presence

We love God by living appreciatively in the presence of our Creator.

We love God by listening to Jesus serve us His Word in the Scriptures

We love God by being open to the Holy Spirit

Quiet reflection and meditation is as important as doing things for God

Coming a bit early to Church to just be quiet in God's presence is very important and valuable time spent.

Listening to the Scriptures as an open receiver is also a way of letting God host us, of letting God serve us. And thus of loving God.

Way back in the O.T., when Moses first encountered God – at the burning bush – the Scriptures tell us of how God said to him "*Be still, and know that I am God.*" And in Luke's gospel, (12:37) we are told that when the Master returns and finds his servants alert and watching, he "*will gird himself and will make them recline and serve them*"

In a few weeks I will ask that we put much of this into practice for a special period of about 15 hours ... I will invite us as a parish to be here in church praying throughout the night as our middle school parish students take part in a lock-in/retreat in our gym. I invite you to support them here with your presence and prayer. We will get this organized in a couple of weeks. You can catch up on your sleep now in preparation for our over night prayer.

This week – maybe each day ... be still, and come to know God. This is the way to love and serve God. Be still, and await the mystery of the Table - as God again sets before us the banquet of eternal life. Be still, and be loved by God.