

4th Sun. Ord. Time (C)

St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes

January 30, 31, 2016 (Catholic Schools Week)

I usually look to the Gospel for preaching ideas. While the Letters of Paul and others are certainly also the inspired Word of God, the Gospel txt is by nature the Good News of Jesus Christ. And, it is the Gospel that determines the First Scripture. So, if you choose to preach on the Gospel, you automatically have a companion piece to provide ideas. But after this week's Parish Mission, and also after alluding to today's Second Scripture in last weekend's homily, I chose to spend time today on St. Paul's wonderful text on love. You know it best from weddings.

On Sunday night of the Mission, Jon Leonetti spoke a bit on family and love. While I didn't catch it myself (somewhat slow at catching things like that) he used the word Family as an acronym for understanding real 'Love'

F – forget

A – about

M – me

I – I

L – love

Y – you

I have a difficult time with the word love, and especially the small, but important, phrase, "I love you." Oddly enough, I have difficulty saying those words even to God. I'm quite sure that I do love God, and I am certain that God loves me. I would not be here with you today if God did not love me. Nonetheless the phrase is nearly impossible for me to say. A few people try to coax it out of me most always they are not successful. And, I know why! I never had it said to me while growing up. Now that I am much older, I am sure that it was there; at least most of the time. And, I have no reason at all to think I was not loved by either of my parents. But it just was not part of my growing up experience. And what you never hear becomes impossible for you to say.

For some people the phrase "I love you" or simply "love you" is a commonly expressed phrase. I hear it all the time. And, I have it said to me frequently. When I hear the phrase, I am tempted to think that is is used too often, that it is even said but not really meant. I am tempted to place it into the same category of another commonly expressed phrase, "Hi! How are you?" This phrase is frequently said by people who never stick around long enough to hear your response especially when the answer you were going to give isn't "fine", but more like "really miserable". So, I have sort of a 'questioning attitude' about the little phrase "I love you". I even sign off on a note with the word 'sincerely', rather than the word 'love'.

On the other hand, I realize how important it is. I know that God is love. I know that a

world without love would really be miserable. And, I believe with all my heart the point of St. Paul in today's Second Scripture.

"If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

It is very clear that love must be the basis of everything. Without it, everything, is hollow and empty. Without love even the most noble words, and what seem to be the most generous of actions are really worthless. And the way to make sure that our love is genuine, we must empty ourselves. There are just too many words today. And certainly there are just too many electronic messages today words that I don't even need to say to you. Jon Leonetti said it so well the other evening Forget About Me.

That is what Jesus did. And that is what was probably so eye-catching for others. They knew and saw this man, the son of the carpenter, speak and act without self-interest. His words and his actions rang true, they rang clear unlike a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal.

And probably what also caught them so positively was how willing Jesus was to die to himself so that the others could have greater life

he let the children come to him
he went to where people were sick; he did not always make them come to him
he found a way to provide them food when they were hungry
he never asked of them anything that he himself was not willing to do like
die to his own self.

This kind of person is really attractive to us; we are inspired by it.

And if you and I learn to love like Jesus, we will also be really attractive to others. And that is the name of the game of being disciples and good stewards attract others to Jesus Christ. Let it be so!