June 30, 2019: Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

This past week was somewhat unusual in the Church’s calendar: we had four solemnities. The Church’s calendar ranks its celebrations in four ways: optional memorial, memorial, feast, and solemnity. Solemnity is the most important of the four. Solemnities are so important that they replace the normal Sunday celebration in Ordinary Time. This past week we had two solemnities that are movable: Corpus Christi and the Sacred Heart, and their placement is based on when Easter is celebrated. The other two are celebrated based on a particular day: June 24 which is the Feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist, and June 29 which is the feast of Saints Peter and Paul.

Though each of these feasts is different, there is a thread, in a sense, that unites them. The tie that binds is God’s unconditional love for us. When we look at what we celebrate in each of these feasts, we need to recognize that each one, in its own unique way, is grounded in God’s love for us, and that love cannot be expressed or experienced in only one way. Rather, God’s love is beyond our ability to truly comprehend in its fullness, and therefore He needs to express it in multiple ways to help us understand how dear we are to Him.

On Sunday we celebrated Corpus Christi, a celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ. In this celebration we are called to contemplate the great gift that is the Eucharist. And, at the same time, we should pause and think about what we receive. It is really, truly, and substantially, the Body and Blood of Christ. God humbles himself to share his very being with us. When we receive the gift of the Eucharist, we come to share in the very life of God. It is the ultimate expression of God’s love for us. God wants us to be in relationship with Him and, as in any real relationship, we must give of ourselves and not allow the relationship to become one-sided. Most relationships falter when the individual seeks simply to meet their own needs: it is about what fulfills them. God, who is truly the center and foundation of all life, and who could rightly expect the entire focus to be on Him, does not do that. Rather, He ultimately puts our needs first by giving us the Eucharist. He shows by example how we are called to love.

On Monday we celebrated the feast of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist. In the opening reading we heard Isaiah proclaim, “... The LORD called me from birth, from my mother’s womb He gave me my name... You are my servant, He said to me, Israel, through whom I show my glory.” In the Birth of John, we are reminded that God has a plan for each and every one of us. No human life is a biological accident. No human life is based on human choice; all life comes about because God made a decision to create a life. And He endowed every life with a purpose; our God does not simply create us and then forget us. He loves us so much that He has both a particular plan of salvation and a universal plan of salvation. The universal plan is that God intends for all people to be saved through the saving actions of Christ. The particular plan is how He wants us to personally live out my salvation. John’s whole life was about pointing us to Jesus, which reminds us that our lives must ultimately be summarized in the same way: we are to bring others to Jesus. In the birth of John, God shows us His love by creating us, saving us, and giving purpose to our lives.

The feast of the Sacred Heart is tied up inexorably with a heresy called Jansenism. Jansenism had a very pessimistic view of God and human nature. It promulgated a rather cold and arid relationship with God. Only perfect contrition on the part of human beings could allow for a real relationship with God, and therefore this heresy supported infrequent communion. There is much that could be written about this particular heresy, but not enough space in this column to address it well. Suffice it to say that the Sacred Heart recognizes clearly why Christ died for us. Yes, we are unworthy of God’s love based on the Fall and our own personal sinfulness. But the Sacred Heart of Christ reminds us that God loves us, not in spite of ourselves, but simply for who we are. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, God showed us His love—that though we are sinners, He loves us so much that He chose to die for us. The Sacred Heart really can be summed up in these words from John, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”

The feast of Peter and Paul was celebrated on Saturday. Peter and Paul are prime examples that we are a Church not of saints, but of sinners striving to be saints. God chose the best possible examples of his expectation for us.
Peter was constantly contradicting himself and his professed belief in Christ. Yet, when the time came, he gave the ultimate example by laying down his life for Christ. Paul persecuted the Church, striving to put Christians to death, and yet this great persecutor became the Church’s greatest missionary. Both Peter and Paul show us what is possible when we open our hearts to the grace of God, and remind us that the only perfection God calls us to is the perfection of unconditional love. Both Peter and Paul could be described in the same way as King David, “I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will carry out my every wish.” They show us God’s love and patience with us. It is not so much about what we do, but why we do it. Love is not about accepting the person for how they see themselves, but loving them for how God sees them.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Fr. Brian