

Fr Dispin John – Homily 30th Sunday Ordinary Time 25/10/2020 St John's Mitcham

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We may sometimes encounter people who get annoyed when, during a mass, a little child cries or walks across the sanctuary. Sometimes the mothers of these children are made to feel very low about themselves by the sheer, sometimes, look of some of the worshipers in the congregation, and I'm glad we are not one of them. We love our children, and our churches, and I believe this is their space. I often wonder about the spirituality of the people who cannot tolerate any disturbance within the context of a worship. Or still worse, you know, when I was giving communion to this elderly gentlemen in a nursing home, a child happened to be making some noise and then he mumbled something like Satan. And I thought, if we fail to see God in those circumstances, then our understanding of God is not real. In fact, it is anything but God. There's another category of people that we often encounter who would say, "You know, I don't need to go to church. I do live a good life. I do good things and I'm very busy and God knows that. So, I don't have to spend time in prayer or go to church".

And today Jesus is talking about something called love. Love your God with all your soul, with all your heart and with all your mind. Love your neighbour as yourself. Now Jesus brings some 600 and plus laws within the Jewish scripture context to just the two commandments and he bases it on love. What kind of love do we have, first of all, for God. God cannot exist without people. You cannot say, "I love God" and do things that do not please God. Then you are a liar. We cannot lead deceptive lives when we choose to call ourselves Christians.

And that is the challenge of the love of God. But on the other hand we cannot say, "I am too busy. I lead a good life. I don't need anything else. I am sufficient. I don't need anything else. I don't need a God. I don't need to spend time with something called a God or somebody called a God". Then once again, we are making ourselves the centre of everything.

Love demands commitment. Any love, for that matter, demands commitment. It's a kind of a stubborn commitment that we see in the life of Jesus. God loved the world so much that he sent his only son for our sake. Now that is a stubborn love. God's love for us is stubborn love. He doesn't give up. Even when we go the other way, like the prodigal son story. God does not give up on that son who went the other way. God was still waiting. The stubborn love. And Jesus displays that stubborn commitment of love, even by shedding his blood on the cross. And that's the kind of stubborn love we are talking about. Love demands a stubborn commitment.

Let's go back now to the story of God's love and balancing that with the love of the ones that are placed in your life. I would like to mention two families that came to my mind as I was preparing this homily.

One was a family that I have known from Thornbury. They have a son who has a lot of difficulty with his disabilities. But for the past so many years, these two parents have sacrificed everything in their lives to look after this son. It is difficult and it is getting more and more difficult, but they are not going to give up on loving their son. It is a kind of stubborn love that demands everything. When I say everything, I mean it, everything. But how do you love? Love is something you keep on keeping on.

It's a tough commitment.

Another family that came to my mind was the Batemans in our parish. Marg and Phil Bateman. After Marg's being bedridden for so many years. The grace with which Phil is looking after her, he would not accept it. That I call a stubborn love. "I'm not going to give up on you, Marg, just because you are in this state, I will love you even more." A stubborn love. Yet in these two cases, two people's lives, I realize I have seen in person that there is something that is deeper than that human love. Every time I meet

Marg, she oozes with so much of God in her. Despite all his busy-ness, Phil would still come here, to the six pm Mass and take communion for Marg. The same thing with the other family that I mentioned.

So, my love for my neighbour or my commitment for the people that God has placed in my life does not take me away from the one that has given me life, looks after me and stands by me. Sometimes loving God can be even tougher. When we go through difficult times, we say, "Is it really worth trusting and loving God when I'm being let down constantly?" Again, that tough love that stubborn commitment, comes into play. Just like when things go wrong, we do not drop our loved ones and run away. We hold on to them even tighter because we feel in their presence we are comforted when things go wrong. Similarly, even when things go wrong, I love you God more because I know it is you who will give me confidence, strength and courage. So the love of God, it's a very demanding one, as much as we love those people that God has placed in our lives, it is very important, I believe, to have that sense of God that surrounds us with his love, but, more importantly, to spend time in his presence and to know that he is real. God is real. God is here and God does not abandon you.

So there you go. Do you really love God? Do you spend time with God in prayer? Do you spend that quality time? Even when things go wrong. Are you stubbornly in love with your God just as God is stubbornly, even madly, in love with you.