

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time A (STM: All Masses) Lay Witness after homily

Love has consequences. I want you to think about that. Love has consequences. J. Philip Newell, in his book *Christ of the Celts*, writes “If we wish to avoid suffering in our lives, we should shut down to the deep love-longings of our soul. For it is because we love that we are in grief when our loves ones die. It is because we love our children that we are in pain when we see them suffer. It is because we love our nations that we are in agony when we see them being false to themselves”

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, today’s gospel really does get to the heart of the message of the Christian life: love God and love others. But we know that love is not easy, and love can hurt. The only reason we experience things like grief is because we have allowed ourselves to love. Heartache and sorrow and anguish are only possible because we have loved. So, is the joy of love worth the pain? The Christian answer to this is always a resounding “yes.” Why? Fundamentally because God is love. If we reject love, we reject God. And this is a God who did not keep himself from pain or sorrow. He cried at the death of Lazarus, he cried with the weeping women on the way to the cross, he looked down upon his Mother and entrusted her to the care of the beloved disciple. This God has known sorrow and grief but also said that He would be with us until the end of time.

Jesus draws his command to love from the Jewish scriptures. This command is the central prayer of Judaism. It is the *Shema* found in Deuteronomy. “Hear O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord.” This was the God who loved Israel and Israel’s job was to love God in return. Jesus builds on this and says we must love ourselves and love our neighbor. But we can only do this once we have loved God. Other people bear the image of God. We are responding to that image when we love others. And this means we love those who are not likeable.

Is this not a good message for us to hear now, at this time in the course of our nation when we there is so much division, so much hatred? The political upheaval of our country as we approach the election is hard to watch. But what if, what if, before we got into any kind of debate over politics we first recognized the person across from us as someone we loved, even if we do not like them or their views or their opinions. What if we said, “I love you because you are of God.” We Christians are obliged to see Christ in all we meet, recognizing that they bear the *imago Dei*. And that is hard, especially when everything about someone we know rubs us the wrong way or their views are so drastically opposed to our views. But that is the Christian calling. And it can hurt us to do so. But love hurts.

Love is risky. It really is. But a world without love and a life without love is dead and empty. We need to take the risk to love. This what the Christ did. He risked it all that fateful day on Calvary. Love gave us the pledge of eternal life. Today, let us love a little more. Let us see those who we disagree with, those who are political adversaries, those who have hurt us as someone we must love, as someone we must something of God within. There really is no other choice. Amen.

Portions adapted from: Proclaim, 10/25/20
