

4th Sunday of Lent – Homily by Fr. Dan Donovan (Mar. 18, 2012)

Today's two readings from the New Testament take us to the heart of what **Christian faith and Christian life** are all about. Throughout his gospel, John focuses our attention on the **person of Jesus** and on what he has come to understand about him in the light of his death and resurrection. For John, Jesus comes from and reveals God. He is **God's Word or Son** in human form. To see Jesus is, in a very real sense, to see what God is like and especially to see how God desires to relate to us.

Today's reading from John contains **three phrases**, three ideas that sum up much of his vision. These are things well worth remembering and thinking about and allowing to permeate our imagination and our heart. In the first phrase, John says: "God so loved the world, that **he gave his only begotten Son**, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." In Jesus, God's love for us takes on **visible form**. It is a love that seeks our well-being. It reveals God as a mystery of love.

The second point John makes is related to the first. "God," he says, "did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." The God who is present and revealed in Jesus is a **God of salvation and liberation**, a God who heals and makes whole, a God who cares about us and seeks our well-being.

The experience that most of us have of ourselves and of the world is often one of brokenness and inadequacy. What the good news preached by Christianity declares is that such things are not the last word about us or the world. Not only do we come from a loving and life-giving God, not only will we return to him, he is present with us on our journey toward him.

The **third affirmation** in today's reading is that **Jesus is light in our darkness**. If we do what is true, John says, if we listen to and follow our conscience, we will come to the light. In it we will recognize that our efforts to do the good are done in God.

The message of today's reading from the letter to the Ephesians is the same as that of John although it is expressed in a somewhat different way. Paul speaks of death and life and of the resurrection of Jesus as a source of new life for us. Like John, Paul is convinced that the only possible explanation for what has taken place in Christ is love. "God," he says, "who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."

Through faith and baptism we have been brought into an intimate relationship with Christ and given a **taste of the eternal life** to which in him we are destined. All this, Paul insists, is a gift of God. By it, God has shown himself to be gracious and kind and on the side of all that is positive and good.

Both readings affirm that the deepest mystery of life and of reality as a whole is **love**. Given our world and the violence and greed that seem to dominate it, is it possible to believe such a message? As affirmative as Christianity's answer to that question is, it also knows that such faith is not easy. It passes through different phases and undergoes a variety of challenges. It needs to be nurtured and nourished, to be deepened and lived.

Over the years, **two things** in particular have helped me to maintain and perhaps even to **deepen my faith**. The first is a rather broad one, an ability to recognize and to rejoice in people and situations that embody goodness and that are life-affirming, people and situations which are clearly positive and in one way or another touched by love. We have all experienced such things: it might be the love of parents for a particularly difficult or needy child or the love of grown children for aging and chronically ill parents. It might be the dedication of a person to the poor or to others in need. It might be related to an experience of great music or beautiful art or significant developments in science and technology. One could easily multiply the examples. Such things

suggest that reality is grounded in a source that is **positive and life-affirming**.

The second and even more important thing that has reinforced my sense of life as rooted in a **mystery of love** has been the **eucharist**. Here for a moment, we leave other things aside and come into the presence of the God. We pray and listen to the Scriptures. We make memory of the self-giving love of Jesus and of God's acceptance of it in the resurrection. We open ourselves to the gift of the bread to life.

The eucharist has often been called the **sacrament of love**. In it we touch love in a special way - the self-giving love of Jesus and the divine love revealed and rendered tangible and accessible to us in his love. Here we find reaffirmed our vocation to love.

Although the eucharist only lasts a few moments, the more we are present to and enter into it, the more will we find ourselves caught up in Christ and in the new life he offers us. Our sharing in the eucharist can't help but deepen and strengthen our faith in love, in God's love for us revealed in Christ and in the love that has been poured into our hearts by the gift of his Spirit. Such faith encourages us to love. In loving, we find ourselves touched by the **mystery of infinite love**.