

Homily
5th Sunday of Easter, 5-19-19

Love one another. That's a hard task for many of us. Things don't go as we want them to go, it's hard for us to love. We practice everything perfectly, we put everything to the test, and then still everything falls short of where we want it to be, it's hard for us to love one another.

It's hard for me to love our microphones. Everything was working perfectly 30 minutes ago! There are always things that change. Whether it's the air conditioner or the fans or whatever it is, we can never get it working. And it's hard for us, it's hard for me, to get to that point where I act out of love in every moment. Because we get frustrated, we get disgruntled at times, when people come and push our buttons. It's hard to love out of that.

But what did Christ tell us in today's Gospel? They will know you're my disciples by your love. How many times have we seen in the news just in the past few weeks people lambasting Catholics and Christians because they aren't loving? "Oh, Christians only love when it's convenient!" At some point, are we being hypocritical, or are they actually calling us out and we have to do something about it? Unfortunately, I think it's a little of both.

I think sometimes we struggle to be Catholic; we struggle to be Christian in every aspect of our lives. Not just when it's convenient, not just when it's easy, not just when we're even at Mass. I don't know about you, but there are times, when even I as a priest at Mass, struggle to be Christian. Think about that! It's hard for us to love each other when people are driving us crazy. And if I have to look at someone who's driving me crazy at Mass, I'm like, "God, really? *Really?* I mean this person's doing this or this or that, and You want me to love THEM??"

That's the call He has for each of us. To love one another despite how much they may drive us crazy. To allow our love to show Whose people we are. We call ourselves Christians because we are followers of Christ. But are we? Do we intentionally follow Christ every day? I think that's a question that's important for us to contemplate. Especially for the six of you who are graduating.

We've done what we could in the last 17, 18 years, to bring you up in the Faith. The next challenge that you have is going to be a difficult one. I failed it. I went from being extremely active at Mass to not going to Mass! Even though my parents had done everything right. But your parents, if you choose to leave the church in the next few years, they're going to blame themselves. (Guilt trip, guilt trip, guilt trip) They're going to blame themselves, because they're going to ask themselves the question, "What did I do wrong, that my children did not get the Faith from me?"

I'm not trying to use this as a guilt trip, but, it's not always bad. Because we have tried our best, with the gifts we've been given. But remember that there are gifts and tools that have been given to each and every one of us by our Baptism, by our Confirmation in the Faith. That those gifts of the Holy Spirit that God has given to us aren't just things to be left in the tool belt of life, but they're to be taken out and used.

So for the six of you specifically, I'm asking you to begin to investigate, and uncover what those gifts were. When you make that next step, when you're away from home, (cause some of you are probably going to be away from home), it's going to be hard to live out your life as you've lived it until now, because the environment is going to change.

What are your plans for next year? Oklahoma State. West Point. OSU. Rose State. Rose State. UCO. So three of you guys are stuck in the city. Three of you guys are going everywhere else. I went to Oklahoma City Community College. Loved it. I went to OU. Failed out. Went to seminary, did a little better. Cause I graduated!

But what I'm saying is wherever God is leading you in your lives, there's going to be temptations. Some of you will leave home, some of you won't. There's going to be temptations for those staying at

home as well. Because there's that temptation to say "I'm grown! I can do what I want to now!" You know that old saying, 'Pride comes before the fall'? Learn from my mistakes, don't make the same ones that I made.

If you put God first in your life, He won't lead you astray. He promises us that He'll never leave us, He will never lead us astray either. But if we don't have Him as part of our lives, then we're being led astray. We're allowing ourselves to be pulled from that path that God has put in front of us. Adults, I speak any untruth here?

I think all of us at times in our lives have made that mistake. In one way or another. Where we put God on the back burner. We try to focus on what's right in front of us. Because that's many times for us what's most important for us. When we get to that point of graduation, and we think, "Ah! I'm done, I don't have to do anything else. Oh, that's right, I'm going to college." You go from being this big fish in a small pond to being a little tadpole in the ocean.

And so we have to be more intentional with everything that we do in our lives. And it begins with this new commandment that God gives us in today's Gospel. To "Love one another as I have loved you." That doesn't mean to like everyone as I have liked you. Or to accept everyone as I have accepted you. But to LOVE everyone. But sometimes you have to have tough love.

And I think that's one of the things that we as Catholics struggle with sometimes. Many non-Catholic Christians look at us and say, Man you guys are great at guilting one another! But you're horrible at loving one another. It kind of hurts to hear that many times. Many times when we hear that we look and say, "Yeah, there is a little bit of truth to that."

It is hard to love one another. Because that means we have to see Christ in one another. And if we don't see Christ within us, then there's no way we're going to see Him within our brothers and sisters! The same thing that I've preached about since I've been here these past three years is what this Gospel's about. How do we see the goodness that lies within us and embrace that and identify ourselves by it?

Instead of embracing what we think is the reality in front of us. Cause the reality in front of us is pretty bleak. Whether you look at politics, or the news or anything out there, it's kind of bleak. We hear about global warming, and we hear about all these things that are happening around the country politically. People running for office, people who have made decisions in certain states, good or bad or indifferent, and we look and say, "Where's God in all this?"

My response is He's in the middle of it. Because God has created each and every one of us in His image and likeness. It's whether we're willing to accept God within our lives. If we are willing to accept Him in our lives, we can see His plan laid out before us. The bigger question should be, "Where is God in my life, and where is He calling me to be?"

How is He calling me out of laziness of life into intentional discipleship? That's an important question to look at. How is God calling each and every one of us to embrace His love? To embrace the role of disciple? Sometimes we just don't want to. It's hard to be a disciple of Christ. It's not that easy job that we think it is. Being a disciple of Christ means putting Him first, which means putting me not-first. Many times not even second or third or fourth.

But in our 'me, me, me, I, I, I, now, now, now' culture, it's hard to embrace that teaching. That doesn't mean it's not possible to embrace it. The important thing is that when we fall, we get back up. To not allow the lie of Satan, the lie of the world to continue to suppress us, but instead to embrace that love that God has for us.

I was talking to one of our younger parishioners before Mass and it's interesting, once we get past the age of 4 or 5, we begin to look at the world a little differently. We begin to think of, "What can I not get in trouble doing?" And "How can I avoid getting in trouble after I've done something wrong?" The reality we're looking at that question the wrong way. Why did we do something to get in trouble in the first place? What was it about our human nature that allowed us to do it?

I think a lot of that is growing. So we have the opportunity to grow and mature. Or to regress into immaturity. Jesus says, unless you have the faith of a child, you cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Then we look at a 4 or 5-year-old that tries to hide their mistakes. And we say, well that's the faith of a child, right? No. What happened right before that? That innocence.

When we were a child, we wanted to believe in the goodness of the world, until that moment when we saw it for the first time as not perfect. Whether it was through our parents, through our siblings, our teachers, our coaches, our pastor, our friends. At some point we lost that innocence. But just because we lost it doesn't mean we can't re-find it. Seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened for you, and that's what I'm going to leave you with today.

Are you willing to take that step today? Are you willing to ask God to change your heart? Because unless we're willing, He won't. He can't. God can't force Himself upon us. He can't force His love upon us. He can't force us to do anything. But if we invite Him in, if we seek Him out, we ask Him for assistance, He'll give us what we need. So Jesus tells us today, "I give you a new commandment. Love one another as I have loved you." How is God calling you to love today?