

Homily – July 8th and 9th

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

“I thank you Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants.”



Two weeks ago, I was involved in Vacation Bible School and this line from our gospel today really came to life. At Vacation Bible School we have children from many different parishes in our diocese and at times from beyond and other faith traditions as well. We also have a wonderfully international flavour to our group as we do weekly at mass. As I watched these kids, who had never met before, interact with each other I couldn't help but notice how they befriended each

other so easily. Their nationality, their skin colour, their beliefs, their point of view on hot political topics; none of it stood in the way of them accepting each other just as they were. When disagreements over major topics such as who got to sit in the best seat, or who had the nicer balloon colour, or who had the most ice cream at snack time arose, they were handled quickly with a hug accompanied by an I'm sorry. For all the folks sitting here today whose age number is north of 10; that used to be us. The questions I was left asking myself each evening as I thought about the day were: “What happened? When did this change? Why did this change?”

A little later in Matthew's gospel, Jesus says, “unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18: 3). **Jesus is asking us to be child-like, not childish.** There is a difference. So, what is a little child like? Well, I think we already looked at some of that. In addition, I think we can say that children are innocent and honest about their feelings. There is no hidden agenda. No ulterior motive. What you see is what you get. And kids do not need to provide a 4-page dissertation on why they like someone. They just do. When my four-year-old granddaughter tells me about Jesus she just says that Jesus loves her, and she loves Jesus. That is a child-like innocence I think we as adults seem to have lost.

We can get so wrapped up in mis interpreted, or poorly translated bible quotes, misunderstood catechesis, something judgmental a family member or adult leader told us when we were young; and we combine that with our low opinion of ourselves. And all of a sudden there is no room left for love. Despite all Jesus tells us about how special and loved we are by God. How even the hairs on our head are counted. We never think we are enough. We seem to be under the impression that God's love has to be bought or earned. We often times set up our own criteria for what it will take for us to get into heaven. A rigid prayer schedule; regular attendance at

mass at least weekly, if not daily. Extra devotions and liturgies. When I was growing up, I can remember my mother having all these things in place for herself and her kids. And let me tell you, missing mass whether you lived at home or were just visiting was not acceptable and may be punished with the deliberate withholding of food. All these things that I have mentioned are wonderful if they are being done with the right motivation. If they are done out of love for God and gratitude for God's love for us, GREAT! If they are done out of a sense of creating moral superiority in an effort to win God's favour; I think this is where we enter the danger zone. My experience has been that if we can meet this self-made criteria, as difficult as it is, then we can become judgmental of those who we feel don't. It becomes easier for us to pass judgment or look down upon those who are not getting it right, in our opinion. We can become intolerant of folks who live their lives in a manner that is not acceptable to us. Then we marry that to one of those bible quotes I mentioned earlier or a church teaching we are pretty sure we remember correctly, and now we have justification to condemn. It also seems to give us license to create God in our image.

I recently read a quote from Anne Lamott, an American novelist and political activist, that said:

“You can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”

A good friend of mine who used to work for the diocese, Deb Gillespie, once told me that when she retired, she wanted to write a blog entitled “A View From the Pew.” I don't know if she ever did, but knowing her, it would be fantastic. I told her that I too would like to write my own blog, speaking with an ego that thinks anybody would read it. My blog would have 5 words in the title: “Go and Tell the Others.” That was the mission given to Mary Magdalene by Jesus outside the tomb after the resurrection. Sounds pretty simple, doesn't it? We have complicated that in so many ways and we have made this statement by Jesus a burden instead of the greatest news ever told.

For those who have felt burdened by trying to live their faith, and coming up a bit short at times (I think that is all of us), Jesus offers a comforting message in this morning's gospel. “Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Come to me when you are a single parent trying to make ends meet and are not quite sure how the bills get paid, and supper gets served.

Come to me when you can't understand why your kids don't believe what you have spent a lifetime teaching them and you are worried about their future.

Come to me when you are young and struggling to find your place because you just don't seem to fit in and there doesn't seem to be anyone you can talk to who will listen without judgment and you are wondering if life is still worth living.

Come to me when the diagnosis is not what you had hoped or prayed for, and you feel alone and afraid.

I believe this is what Jesus wanted us to **go and tell the others**. I believe our mission is to share love. My mission does not involve passing judgment on anyone. That is not my job, and I don't want it.

Jesus tells us: "they will know you belong to me by how you love". So, how do we love? Three things:

we have to be accepting - be respectful of everyone's journey. Everybody is carrying something. We should be in awe of all that someone has to carry instead of in judgment of how they choose to carry it.

be welcoming - be willing to welcome new faces into the fold. Make it a point to get to know them. Be like the children we spoke of earlier. Be willing to say, "I don't know much about you, but I am truly glad you are here."

"Cheers story" - if you remember the television show "Cheers", then you must remember the theme song which stated, "**You want to be where everybody knows your name**". People want to be where everyone knows their name. That should be church.

be genuine - don't try to be something we are not and what we are not, is perfect. It's OK to acknowledge that we have room to improve. Who doesn't?

I read once that any trait you recognize in another, be it good or bad, you recognize it because that same trait exists in you. Maybe that is why we can be so quick to judge, because we can see in someone else something we don't like about ourselves. And if we can't give ourselves permission to be imperfect, how can we give it to someone else?

I told our kids once to never take away someone's inalienable rite to be a jerk because you will exercise your own at some point.

The one whom we hail as our guiding light tells us this morning that he is gentle and humble of heart and that in him we will find rest for our souls. The only way we can communicate this with any kind of effectiveness is if the people God puts in our path find rest for their souls and gentleness in us and find the unconditional acceptance they have not felt since they were a child, playing with other children. This week let's make it our mission to lighten some burdens.

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