

Quinquagesima Sunday

We celebrated Valentine Day yesterday, so love is in the air, at least the world's idea of love. In one of those interesting coincidences, we even have an Epistle reading about love from the great love chapter of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13. And then we have the Gospel lesson that reminds us Lent is upon us, Ash Wednesday is this week. Better enjoy all this love and joy while you can, because in three days that all ends, right? I mean, as far as Ash Wednesday and Lent is concerned, it is a time of reflection on our life and the sacrifice that Jesus paid for us on the Cross. It's certainly not a time of Joy, because the sinless, righteous son of God had to die a horrible death for us to be saved. Sorry to say this, but not one of us are righteous enough to enter into heaven by our own merits. Only Jesus, was righteousness enough to get into heaven by His own merits, by His love for us.

In the first part of today's gospel reading, Jesus took the twelve aside and told them of the coming events of His death and resurrection. But the disciples did not understand what was being told to them or even comprehend the events ahead. They were still spiritually blinded to the message of the Messiah, even after following him for three years. After seeing all that they have seen, how could they still not understand the love that Jesus brought to the world?

I want you to think about it for this a minute, is this not the most amazing love ever? That this would be the will of God, the Father, for His one and only Son? Then on top of that, Jesus, the Son of God, would submit to and accomplish this will of the Father for us? What, then does this say about God's will and His love for us!? Ponder this, that a Father will deliver His only Son to be handed over to be mocked, insulted and spit upon. Then He will be flogging almost to death and in the end, He will let them kill Him on the cross. But even more than that, the Son would not insist on His own way, but for the joy set before Him will endure all this, even the cross. Would you do this for a stubborn and ungrateful people, like us? All of this was done for one reason, that God could have a relationship with you and me. He loved us so much, that He would give up His only Son, to die a horrible death, so you could go to heaven and not hell!

You see, love has everything to do with Lent, and Lent has everything to do with love, because Lent is all about looking at the suffering and death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for us. Jesus suffered and died not for His own good, but in loving obedience to His Father's will and as a loving sacrifice for you and me. Now that's love! Would you die like this for your father and not even question it. If His love is that great for us, then are you loving others the same way?

Love is all about Jesus, the Son of the living God. Do you want to know what true love is? Love is not a feeling, but an act. True love is sacrificing yourself for a love one, giving yourself up for them, for their happiness and well being. Your happiness comes from serving them. This is what Jesus showed us in His life, through His messages and death upon the cross. He showed us that we need to be servant leaders. A servant is one who waits on everyone else. A Christian, serves their love ones, friends, co-workers and world, as an example of what Christian love is. Men

should be the servant leader of their homes, women should be the servant leader of their husbands and children. We all should be servant leaders of our friends, co-workers and the world. So we can show them the love of God the Father and of His Son, by the way we lead our lives and treat others. This is being a witness for the Gospel. Are you loving everyone in your life this way? Can you say, I am living my life as a servant leader to those around me?

Faith and hope abide in us because of Jesus, who is love and in love suffered and died for us. He distributes His love throughout the world in order that we can live in faith and hope, even amidst all the adversity and suffering we face in this world. Jesus abides in His Church to love us in and send us out, with the Good News, with knowing our sins have been absolved in the eyes of God, so that we can be in the full loving embrace of our Father.

In the last part of today's gospel reading, shows us what we need to truly understand love. It is interesting that Luke pairs this story with the healing of blind Bartimaeus. The comparison with physical blindness helps us understand the seriousness of the disability we are dealing with. If physical sight is valuable to us, how much more should spiritual vision be! It would be a great tragedy to miss the light of this world, but how much greater to miss the Light that God gives us? Nothing could be more serious. Spiritual blindness can cost you God's blessing in this life and heaven in the next. That is God's love to us.

I do not know whether Luke did it on purpose or not, but the combination of these two stories certainly helps bring out the difficulty of curing spiritual blindness. Physical blindness is much easier, even for the Lord Jesus Christ himself! All it took was one simple request from Bartimaeus, and his physical sight was restored. But the disciples were constantly asking, "Teach us to pray, explain this parable, show us the Father," and yet they still did not see. It took one word from Jesus to cure Bartimaeus' physical blindness. All that was spoken and done by Jesus in His ministry, was not sufficient for the disciples' spiritual blindness. I know nothing of the power of God and I assume to know nothing, for that would be heresy. But the one thing that seems difficult even for the all powerful God is to remove the spiritual blindness from the hearts of men. That's why we could never get into Heaven on our own accord, which could only be accomplished by the love of His only Son dying on the cross for us.

Bartimaeus may have been blind, but he saw some things about Jesus that others with vision did not see. Bartimaeus had come to see that Jesus was the Messiah. That is why he called Him the "son of David". Somehow, Bartimaeus had taken the things he had heard about Jesus and it all came together in his mind. He understood the truth that most people in that day missed or even in this day. He saw the truth that Jesus was the Messiah!

Before a lost person can call out to the Lord for salvation, they must first understand just Who He is. They must see Him as their only hope. They must understand that He alone can save their souls and forgive their sins. They must see that Jesus is more than a teacher or some poor fellow

Who got Himself killed on a cross. They must come to understand that He is the Son God. They must see that He died for their sins. They must see that He rose again from the dead.

What is the cure for spiritual blindness and hardness of heart? I wish I knew! Not all the Bible reading in the world, in and of itself, will do it. Not all the good preaching in the world, in and of itself, will do it. Ultimately, even with all of these tools at our disposal, we must wait on the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. If a lost sinner is going to see Jesus and understand Who He is and what He can do for them, the Holy Spirit is going to have to show them. That is why Jesus said what He did in John 6:44. It takes the Spirit of God touching the sinner's dead heart and causing them to understand the truth. When that happens, they will call on Jesus. At least, that was my experience.

Look at the disciples in today's gospel reading. But they understood none of these things, Jesus saying was hidden from them. We have to jump ahead to Luke 24:45, to how they understood, "And He opened their understanding, which they might comprehend the Scriptures." Ok, is that not where we want to be? Let's go on one step farther. What was it that unleashed the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, so they could complete that journey? It was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus which brought home to them the spiritual truths they could not yet see. And so, if we truly want the Spirit to do his work of illuminating our eyes to the truths of Scripture, then we need to look to the love Jesus gave to us!

For the death of Christ for these disciples was the death of all their hopes, all their dreams, and their whole life's work. The death of Christ was also the death of all their pride. The death of Christ was to them that death to self, which makes possible the resurrection of faith, understanding, and responsiveness to the Word of God. Only after that death were the disciples ready, to receive the message of Jesus. The love of God is His grace. It is only through Jesus love for us, can we open our spiritual blindness.

That's what Jesus does when He saves a soul too, by removing their spiritual blindness. He takes that old sinner, washes his sins away and puts the Holy Ghost in him. That child of God begins to walk a new path through life. They want to follow Jesus. They want to tell others what the Lord has done for them. They can't help but brag on Jesus for His grace and His blessings. They are a new creature and everyone who sees them knows that they are different. That is the power of our Savior. God doesn't care about your religion. He doesn't care about your good works. He doesn't care who you are or what you've done. All God cares about is this; do you know Jesus? Are, you saved by His love?

Nothing will win the victory over others and over circumstances like love! Do you love like God? I think we need to learn to love like Jesus, so we can reach the world with the Good News by showing them our love by being a spiritual leader and more important, that we can have the right kind of spiritual life. How is your love life this morning?