

Homily For Tuesday of the Weekdays of Christmas - Year II

St Peter's 8:30/7:30 Masses - Jan 7, 2019

1 Jn 4:7-10 "Not that we loved God but he loved us and sent his Son as atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Ps 72 "May righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more."

Mk 6:34-44 "Jesus had compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd ."

Love Lessons

Introduction

An article that just caught my eye was a bout new research showing that people who want to be more successful and happy should do the opposite of what we are usually told. They should spend less time thinking about their self improvement and more time learning to like people. Instead of "How can I improve?" the better question might be, "How can I start seeing more of the good in people, more often?"

For Christians, this should not be a surprising idea. We frame it in terms of love, the love God has for us, the love we cannot possibly hope to deserve and yet are called to be open to receiving, then sharing with others. That love is Jesus' specialty, of course. It is also visible in the lives of the saints, which we are called to be. It is certainly visible in a tangible way in today's saint, Andre Bessette.

First Letter of John

I don't know if the people in John's community got tired of hearing him talk about love, almost 30 times in this letter. I would be afraid that it would lose its meaning after awhile. My little children, love one another. He certainly never got tired of saying it.

But what is love really, and where does it come from? John says it over and over again in different ways. God is love. Love comes from God. When we love, we are living the divine life of God. When we refuse to love, it is as if we have no knowledge of God.

God can only act out of love because that is his nature. And that nature comes to us by his acting in history. As one commentator put it, the love of God spills over into history, when he sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins. This love for sinners is entirely gratuitous. When we live in that love it becomes greatest proof of the truth of Christianity.

St. Andre Bessette

Was this not what brother Andre was doing when he welcomed the spiritually and physically sick and suffering at the College Notre Dame? There is no reason from his background that suggests he would be particularly welcoming of people. It tells us that he was orphaned at 12, had no education and was a sickly child. He was given the lowest job, essentially the doorman. But because of his great gift for hospitality, of welcoming people, many experienced spiritual consolation and even physical healing. The evidence of these things is still there today at St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal.

Mark

In today's Gospel, we can see where that gift of hospitality comes from. Jesus and his disciples were on their way to have some quiet retreat time after a period of heavy ministry. They were tired in every way and looking forward to the break and just being with Jesus. This is instructive for us. We should recognize our need to be alone with Jesus in the middle of the busy-ness of our lives.

But that's not what happened. Crowds of people were anticipating where Jesus would be and got there even before he did. Can we relate to them? We have the longing to be healed, to tell our stories of sorrow to someone who will listen. That is why Brother Andre became a saint. As he became known for his healing presence, more and more people came to him. Like Jesus, he did not turn them away.

Mark tells us that Jesus had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus was moved by their hunger and sorrow, but mostly their ignorance. And so, he taught them many things. This is a favourite image of Jesus in Mark's Gospel. He heals of course, but he teaches them.

Contrasted with Jesus' hospitality, the disciples finally suggested that he send them away to get something to eat. Now Jesus turned his teaching to those disciples: "You give them something to eat." How are we supposed to do that? It would take a year's wages. With Jesus, of course, it is not about the money. It is about the willingness to love. How many loaves do you have? Five, and two fish. With love, that will be enough. And all ate and were filled. That's the message, isn't it? When it is the manifestation of the love of God, whatever we have, however small, is enough.

Today in the Eucharist, we will experience again the exact same process of love. What does Mark say? Jesus took the bread, he blessed it, he broke it, and he gave it to the people. This language is only found here in this passage and at the Last Supper. Further, Jesus does not give the multiplied bread directly to the crowds but distributes it to them by the hands of his apostles. This foreshadows their role as priests of the New Covenant, giving to the people the heavenly bread that Jesus provides in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, he does it again. He makes something what it was not before.

Call To Action

I think we undervalue hospitality, and the humility it takes to do it, the loving humility of a St. Andre. Sometimes we, like the disciples, are called to meet serious human needs at just the point we find ourselves at the very end of our ropes, physically and spiritually. At that moment we become the body of Christ in our brokenness, which is blessed and given to others.

It is now the job of Jesus' disciples to feed those who are like sheep without a shepherd. To make sure If what we provide is not to be the spiritual equivalent of junk food, we must identify ourselves more and more closely every day with the God who is love.