

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Mark Twain once said that everyone is a moon and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody. If that is true, and I suspect it is, it is also true that God sees that dark side that nobody else can see. The Good News is that He loves us anyway.

The truth of that is shown in our first reading today where the prophet, Nathan, confronts David with the evil he has done. Despite God having rescued David from the hand of Saul who was seeking to kill him; despite God making him the King of both Israel and Judah; despite all that God gave him and did for him, David rapes Bathsheeba, has her husband, Uriah, killed, to cover up his crime, and then takes Bathsheeba as his wife. He thought he had gotten away with these heinous acts. But God saw this dark side of David. Realizing there is no place to run, no place to hide, David repents. And we hear his beautiful prayer of repentance in the 51st Psalm, which is a part of my nightly prayer that I recommend to all of you.

Nathan responds to David's prayer: "The Lord on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die."

The woman in today's Gospel, on the other hand, has nothing to hide. She is known as a public sinner. God only knows what led her into this sinful way of life. Was she sexually abused as a child? Was she abandoned by her parents? Was she rejected by someone she thought loved her? We only know that when she encounters Jesus, all she can do is fall at his feet and cry. Her tears are so great, that she dares to bear her head, which was unheard of (all women at the time, veiled their heads), and washed his feet with her tears. Performing the act of hospitality and welcome that the Pharisee had denied Jesus, along with anointing his head, this woman then anoints his feet with an exquisite ointment carried in an alabaster jar. Jesus proclaims her forgiven because of her act of love.

Then, there is St. Paul, who lived a truly righteous life, who had been obsessive in living according to the law of the Lord, and sought to punish and persecute, and even kill those who he deemed, did not. He recognizes now that the works of the law did not justify him or make him righteous, rather it is only in living "by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me," that makes him just in the sight of God. If that were not so, Paul says, "then Christ died for nothing."

As I reflected on these Scriptures, my dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, it has occurred to me that few of us can truly say that we love God. Does that shock you? If you think about it for a minute, you will come to see, it is true. Few of us really love God. We can say that we believe in God or that we reverence God or, perhaps, even fear God. But, if we're honest, we would have to say that we do not really love God.

The great commandment says that we should love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Can you say that you love God with your whole heart? Probably not! The problem is that we do not love God with our whole heart because we have never experienced the realization of what it means when God says to us, "You are forgiven".

St. Paul struggled mightily to obey the Law of the Lord because he believed it to be the path to salvation. David believed he could hide the darkness that lurked within him from the evil he had done. The woman covered by shame because of the life she was forced to live, could only cry great tears of sorrow for what her life had become.

God's forgiveness was freely and gratuitously given to each of them, not because they loved God, but because he first loved them. And he proved that love for each of us in the death and resurrection of Christ. The price for our sins has been paid. We are forgiven. We have been made acceptable to God through the death of Jesus Christ. St. Paul expresses this in his letter to the Galatians, "I will not treat God's gracious gift as pointless. If justice is available through the law, then Christ died to no purpose."

Now, the problem for us who have always been in the Church, always do the right thing, always seeking to be prim and proper, is that many of us don't know how to give thanks to God anymore. Many of us, in fact, complain because God hasn't done even more for us.

All of which brings me back to my major point today which is that few in the Church really love God. Oh, Yes, we believe in Him, we reverence Him, we may even fear Him; but we don't really trust in His Love and Forgiveness. Like David, some seek to hide their darkness so no one will ever know of it; or like Paul, we seek to justify ourselves by living what looks like righteous lives for others to see; or we simply cry private with shame as the woman in the Gospel. But none of that constitutes loving God with all your heart, your mind, your soul, and your strength.

Forgive me now if I hold up examples of ways in which we fail to show that we love God; both great and small:

One that worries me at every Mass I celebrate each weekend is how few can bring themselves to sing God's praises. Most sit back as at a concert, while others complain and don't think we need all this music anyway. A people who really loves God because they have experienced his forgiveness wouldn't worry about what others thought of their voices. They couldn't contain themselves in singing and shouting out his praises. The last thing on their minds would be what others thought of them. They would lose themselves in praising God for loving and forgiving them.

Another concern of mine is the obvious. The fact that we have to constantly appeal to you to support God's Church financially does not speak of a people who love God and is grateful for his forgiveness. As I've said so often, "Our problem is not financial, it is spiritual." You simply are not trusting God with a grateful share of all with which He has blessed you.

But, perhaps, what speaks to me of how little we love God is how stingy so many are in giving themselves in service in the Church. Thank God, we do have a great core of about 50 to 60 member families, out of 1,150 registered households, who give very, very generously of their time and talents, for whom I am most grateful; while there are probably at least twice as many who sit back and criticize or denigrate as a "clique" those who give of themselves. Most others simply couldn't care less.

In his first epistle, St. John makes clear how we can prove that we love God. He says, "We, for our part, love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'My love is fixed on God,' yet hates his or her brother or sister, is a liar. One who has no love for the brother or sister that is seen, cannot love the God not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: whoever loves God must also love his brother and sister."

Many will feel relieved by this teaching, saying, "Ah, I don't hate anyone". However, what is far worse than hate is apathy, choosing to ignore others and their needs, closing those "others" out of our minds and hearts. When we do that, we close God out of our minds and hearts.

Thankfully, the world was blessed this weekend to reflect on the life a man who truly loved God. He spent the last 35 years of his life, many of them hampered by a debilitating disease, reaching out to and rejoicing in people of every race and religion and region of the world, telling people we had to love one another. Himself proclaimed the greatest, spoke most often and most forcefully of the greatness of God. He insisted that leaders of every religion speak at his funeral and that it be open to people of every race, religion, ethnicity, and language. He wanted it held in the city of his birth in the land that he loved. And he had what he wanted as his epitaph scrolled across the program for his funeral service. Of all the words that he spoke, reverent and irreverent, funny and foolish, Muhammed Ali wanted these remembered, "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth." Please let me repeat that. "SERVICE TO OTHERS IS THE RENT YOU PA FOR YOUR ROOM HERE ON EARTH."

It is only in sacrificially serving others that, indeed, we know that we love God. This weekend I am blessed to acknowledge some of our members who have shown their love for God in the loving service they have provided for our Church Family.

Several years ago, I initiated the Pastor's Scholarships to express gratitude to our graduating Seniors who have exhibited "Servants' Hearts", that is giving generous, sustained service to our Church Family. The Scholarships are very modest, only \$500.00 each, given by myself, with the help of my family and other parishioners over the years. This year I was assisted by Janice and Joe Dagney, and Mary and Rob Wishneski, to whom I express my gratitude. They are meant to encourage not only these beautiful, generous, giving young people, but all of us, to recognize the truth taught in the Epistle of St. James, "...what good is it to profess faith without practicing it? Such faith has no power to save one, has it? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and no food for the day, and you say to them, "Good-bye and good luck! Keep warm and well fed," but do not meet their bodily needs, what good is that? So it is with the faith that does nothing in practice. It is thoroughly lifeless."

Or again as Ali said it, "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth."

Because of the service they have given, it can be said with great confidence that the young people we acknowledge this weekend get it. They do love God. For your example and your service that show that you love the God who first loved you: I proudly announce and gratefully bestow the 2016 Pastor's Scholarships upon: Andrew Agen, Jonathon Capato, Matt Carr, Mary Kate McCracken, and Anna Pepe: THANK YOU!

(Their records of service and plans for the future are in this week's bulletin and can be found on our website)