

FROM THE PASTOR

Was that a great Parish Mission or what? By all reaction of those who attended, it was an unequivocal success. Father Jim Marchionda challenged, inspired, taught, and entertained us. He made us laugh, taught us to sing, called us to prayer, and reminded us to love one another. In a smooth and easy style, Father Jim was able to remind us of the richness and the challenge of the Word of God that is our life in Christ. Calling us beyond who we think we are as Catholics, he has reminded us who we are suppose to be, and have been empowered to be as Christians; the light and presence of God to one another. Through stories and anecdotes, we were reminded of why we are drawn to Christianity and how we can awaken in ourselves the desire to love and be loved.

Loving and being loved can be a wearying task through the course of life. We know we want to be loved and need to be loved, but sometimes the effort and pains cause our interest to wane. We are hurt by love, or disappointed, or we are made vulnerable by love; sometimes our love is rejected, insulted or ignored. This is too often the human experience. We learn to live with less love, and choose to satisfy ourselves with various pleasures or compulsions. Habits are created, walls go up, selfishness sets in, and it becomes a way of being.

To one degree or another doesn't this sound like the emotional habits of many of us? Yet the desire to love and be connected with others never dies. We know there is more for us, but the comfort and security of our habits tend to get the better of us, and we simply say, 'well, that's just how I am'. It may be how we have come to be, but it is not how we are supposed to be. The inner desire and longing for love tells us so.

We have long been told, correctly, that we are made to love one another. We have not often been told, yet it is equally true, that we have been created *to be loved*. You and I have been created by God to be loved by God. God created us to love us. It is unnatural and out of the human order to not allow love into our lives. Yet, because love is difficult, vulnerable, and often painful, we frequently choose to guard and measure where and how and who we will allow to love us.

Isn't this how the order and design of God's love breaks down in the human experience? Emotional walls are built between family members, friends, strangers, people who are different from us, and certainly our enemies. These walls ripple out and divisions are created between the rich and the poor, races and nations, religious denominations, and most anyone who thinks and acts different from us. Where doors to love are closed, walls of division and fear are created.

Today's gospel is a good example. Jesus has been teaching in the temple where he is approached by the chief priests and elders. They question Jesus' authority: where it comes from and how he got it. This is a wall. This is a group of people who have decided that living out of authority and power is better than living out of love and compassion. Their authority is being threatened and they want to know by whom.

Jesus is trying to change the minds of the religious authorities back to a way of love and compassion. They seem to want nothing to do with it. Jesus uses a story. One son rejects his father's request, but then changes his mind and goes to the vineyard. The other son quickly says yes to the father, but never goes at all. Which is honoring the father? The elders give the right answer by saying the first son. Yet, they fail to see that they are like the second son.

How are they like the second son? They have made a fine art of saying yes to God with rules and authority that only serve their own purpose. In reality, they do not work in the vineyard of God, and have very little to do with the things of God because they do not love. Fine a system as it may be in the name of religion, it serves God's purpose and design in nothing.

How shocked and insulted these priests and elders must have been when they are told that the tax collectors and prostitutes will come to the place of God's comfort and acceptance before they will. In their thinking it is an impossibility, insulting and scandalous. These minds will not be easy to change because they have made their way of being secure by false authority. It is the authority of their own making, in the name of God, but does not include the truth and reality of God. There is no room for love.

We are made to be loved because we are made out of love by God who is love. We are most human and most happy when we love ourselves and others. It is our deepest nature and identity to do so. As we all know, this does not mean it will be easy. On the other hand, challenging as love can be, it is the best way to live, the truest way, and in the end the only way.

Jesus has shown what is possible for those fully open to God's love. In receiving all love from the Father, Jesus could only be all love for us. To be fully human is to love fully. Let's keep practicing. It will make us happier and we will be making God much more evident in the world.

Father John Esper