

# Homily for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 2-3, 2019

Readings: Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 12: 31—13:13; Luke 4: 21-30

Preacher: Margie Brenza

As with all scripture, the beauty lies not only in the words but their potential to change our lives and the lives of those we encounter on the path of awareness and ongoing conversion.

The prophetic voice of Jeremiah reminds us that God's purpose for us was well formed before our birth. We have been dedicated to the Holy One who has trusted us to fulfill the gifts given specific to each of us; to participate in that mission known to God to be shared with the world. Sounds a bit overwhelming, doesn't it? We've been given specific gifts to be shared with a vast number of people unknown to us and we have to oblige even on our best of days. It reminds me of Mary's words at the visitation, "How can this be?"

As with Mary, we learn throughout our lives the power of God's deliverance. The strength of persistence, the courage of words, the gift of prayerful silence and the grace that God has sealed on our hearts at baptism. To go into this uncertain world being the hands of Christ with one intention....love.

The examples of love Paul writes to the people of Corinth are beautiful and powerful. At weddings, they are inspiring reminders as to the expectation of the couple's marriage and hopes for the future vowed in front of God and witnesses. At funerals, these words of testimony offer a description of the deceased with an intention to capture a brief picture of their life by utilizing this valued scripture. Throughout our lives, from birth to death, we are captivated and motivated to bring "love" into our lives. It is a stabilizer for life's most challenging moments and itself a moment of challenge for the simplest and most complex decision making.

As Paul conveys, "love" takes on many faces that require us to step up every day to be patient, kind, fair, humble, respectful, compassionate, caring and bearing burdens. It warrants surrender, truth, understanding, hope, endurance and ongoing conversion of our hearts. Most significantly, it reminds us that it is not always necessary to be right but to maintain a relationship with one another. A choice that we have each day when going out into our worlds. A choice that can make or break the spirit of those we encounter whom God sets in our path.

These words offer a glimpse into who Jesus was on earth. A life motivated out of pure love, a radical shift for the people of his time and an expectation for us today. What will our response be? Can we ourselves be gracious receivers of love?

Recently, I found myself in a conversation with an older gentleman acquaintance. He shared the struggles endured throughout his life, which set unattainable “religious” expectations of behavior that have saddled him for years. This centered itself in the commandments, Sunday obligation and tithing. Not in a relationship with Jesus based on love but out of obligation. It was creating hardships emotionally, physically and financially.

As pastoral people our hearts break when we are witness to such stories. Most apparent was the inner turmoil it caused. This relationship, formed through rules and regulations, hampered the potential of a loving and caring bond with God and various relationships. These were not the “spiritual gifts” that Paul encouraged. This man’s rules kept many at arm’s length and altered the true purpose of the man God knew “before he was formed in the womb.” A purposeful life of knowing and sharing the faith, hope and love of God. One can only share if one’s heart has been graced with conversion.

And so it is in the gospel. Jesus sitting in the synagogue offering words of truth to deliver them from slavery. “Amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.” No fury or fireworks, simple truth. The intense rise of anger came from those who knew him. Many experienced Jesus’ wisdom day after day in the synagogue and grew up with this “rabbi.” Fear had taken over. Hearts were closed to his message. Even as they drove Jesus out of town and witnessed his passing through their midst, it still wasn’t enough.

When is the known presence of God in our lives enough to motivate us to live from a place of love? From the simplest to the complex, can we set aside indifference and selfishness? It is one thing to pray but yet another to live out what is discovered in that prayer. The resistance to live out the call to love and be loved is only graced by the willingness to trust and surrender our lives to the God who makes *all* things new.

