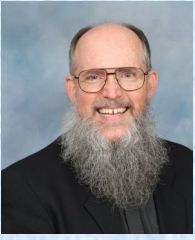


Homily Rerun: July 2, 2017, Who Do You Love! (Fr Bill)



“Anyone who loves Fr. Seno more than me ...” The silliness of that phrase leads me to two questions about today’s Gospel: 1.) Is Jesus consumed with petty jealousy, insecurity, or vanity? 2.) Is it a competition between Jesus and others that you love? The answer to both questions is obviously, NO. That answer is the context in which we are to understand the teaching of Jesus in today’s Gospel.

What is our right relationship with God & others? Jesus answered this question when He gave us the “greatest commandment” in 2 parts: Love of God and Love of Neighbor. (Another homily would include Love of Self as a third part.) All this love must be in right relationships. William Shakespeare instructs us about right relationships in his play, “King Lear:”

- ◆ The play begins with the elderly king dividing up his kingdom between his three daughters. Lear introduces the ‘competition’ with: “Which of you shall we say doth love us most? That we our largest bounty may extend.”
- ◆ Goneril, the first born, goes first and professes her love for her father in an opulent eloquence possible only for an artist like Shakespeare.
- ◆ Regan then says that Goneril’s words are accurate for her also only they fall short and adds to them with an equally opulent eloquence.
- ◆ Lear’s vanity hits its stride as he turns to Cordelia, the youngest and his favorite, saying: “Now, our joy, although the last, not least; ... what can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters?”
- ◆ After some dialogue in which Lear’s fury is raised to the level of his vanity Cordelia says: “I love your majesty according to my bond; nor more nor less. To which Lear responds: “How, how, Cordelia! Mend your speech a little, lest you mar your fortunes.” And Cordelia elaborates: “Good my lord, You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I return those duties back as are right and fit, obey you, love you, and most honor you.”
- ◆ Not satisfied with this true expression of real love Lear disowns and banishes Cordelia. [Read the play to get ‘the rest of the story.’ It is well worth the read.]

So, what are the ‘duties we must return to God’ according to the relationship He has initiated with us?

- ✠ God is our Creator. God elevated us on a pedestal high above the rest of creation when He created us in His image and likeness. This alone is awesome, but it was not enough for God.
- ✠ God is our Father. In baptism He has chosen us to be His beloved sons and daughters. We know this and speak it with some ease. But do we ever really think about what we are saying? It is beyond comprehension or understanding. It is a mystery that is more closely approached through imagination, poetry and music, and even then it exceeds our grasp by a wide margin. But the love of God is still not satisfied.
- ✠ He has given us His only begotten Son to be our Brother as well as our Savior. Unbelievable! – Yet true it is and believe it we do! Jesus, the God-man goes further.
- ✠ Jesus has given us His mother to be our mother. Mary loves each one of us with the tenderness and strength with which you moms love your children.
- ✠ [Please note (especially if the love of your father or mother was flawed, broken or in some way hurtful to you) that Father God and Mother Mary love you with a flawless love that fills the painful gaps you may experience from your childhood.]

This is the relationship that God has initiated and established with us! In spite of having heard it over and over again, we can’t get our minds around it. It is too big, too good, too much! It is beyond comprehension and understanding. It is even beyond imagination.

So, how do we respond to this relationship with God – which He started? We must do our duty. To paraphrase Cordelia’s words: ‘We must love God in the fullness of His majesty and according to our duty; nor more nor less. We must make return to God according to what He has given to us. We must obey God, love God, and most honor God.’ This doesn’t sound very exciting, inspiring or romantic. but it is the essence of love. The first letter of St. John teaches this same message in teaching us that God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God and God in him, and also explaining that to love God is “nor more nor less” than to obey Him.

To accurately understand today’s Gospel we must understand that between our love for God and our love for others there is not competition but communion. Our love for others we can see incarnates and demonstrates our love for the God we cannot see. Our love for God brings depth, richness, beauty and even perfection to our love for others.

God is not first on our list of priorities – He is our all in all. God is not #1 at the top of the list – He is the list! – He is the poster board on which the list is written!

I invite you to take today’s Gospel home with you by asking yourself the always pertinent question sung by Bo Diddley in 1965: “Who do you love?”