

17th Sunday in OT '08

We know the two greatest commandments: Love the Lord your God with you heart, mind, & soul, & Love your neighbor as yourself. The question today is how do we **respond** to God's love? The parables of Jesus challenge us to look at life in a new way; to search the places in our lives where we are called to love. The moments of crisis in our lives—not the dramatic crisis, but those every day moments are when we can either **choose the good or ignore the good**. We can choose **consolation**--a move toward the desire to love and serve the Lord or we can choose **desolation**, a move away from the desire to love & serve the Lord. We have to **notice the fluctuation of heart**, the movement away from the desire to love & serve & respond to that.

The kingdom of heaven is right here in our midst. Is it possible that those treasures exist right under our noses? Could it be that the love of family, or friends are the pearls of great price? It isn't just in our homes, but any place where we walk in the field where treasures lie. Today's parables invite us to take a look at the ordinary. The deepest treasure of love is often right before us. The Gospel encourages us to look beyond the surface; to look to the deeper meaning of the **events**, the **people**, and the **places** in our lives.

We read in the Gospels about acts of charity and justice as ways that Jesus wants us to love. Although we look for **dramatic opportunities** to do good, we actually encounter hundreds of choices daily, where we have the chance to choose good—person driving slowly, 20 or less items line, an unkind remark, getting on my nerves, someone is in need & we don't have time, or just feel jealous, it's a chance to respond. Notice when we feel that slight tug, that **fluctuation of heart** when we begin to move away from desire to love.

In a previous homily, I stated that **expectations** often lead to **desolation**. Recently, I viewed a Special on 20/20 regarding the Danes from Denmark as the happiest people in the world. Research says the #1 predictor of **happiness** or **well being** is relationships, close friendships, & family, not affluence or power. The Danes consider themselves successful if they are happy and have time with family and friends. "The money is not that important."

The entire country buys into these values. "It's more about softer values, not being stressed, feeling passionate about what you're doing." As laid back as they are, they don't lack ambition. One said, "We have high hopes, but don't get disappointed if they don't pan out." **Expectations**.

How do we respond to God's love?

A Franciscan who serves the poor & underprivileged put it this way. We are the sacramental understanding of life. We are being the **Eucharist** for others. That's what life is for me. He says it's not about being a martyr, but about giving life to others. We are commissioned at the end of Mass, "Go in the peace of Christ to love & serve the Lord & others, as Mass nourished us to do.

Anita and I missed our community of family and friends while we were studying at Creighton. We are truly blessed here at St. Raphael. We are **grateful** to have the people, the personalities, & the cultures in our lives. The Kingdom of heaven is in our midst. Our treasures are here.

We often think of God being in a separate place, in church or when we pray. We fail to realize He is with us daily, in everything, in every place, & every event. We are encouraged to live our daily lives by staying in the present & finding God in all things. My brothers & sisters, this week when the opportunity arises to respond to that **fluctuation of heart, choose life**, move **toward** the desire to love and serve the Lord.

When we're too busy & can't be bothered, I invite you to just **stop** take a few minutes to be present, to observe the things around you, big & small, nature, art, music, take a walk, or sit in the church or chapel, or as I did last week simply watch a magnificent sunset in the evening, and you will sense God's presence in all things. It will change your life.