

Homily  
24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in OT  
September 11, 2022

God loves you! God loves you! God loves you!

How many of you know this? I know this. This is a basic understanding of our faith. God loves us!

But how many really understands what this means? On the surface, sure, it means God loves us. But what about deep down? Stripped away from all distractions, removed from all noise and interference, how do we understand God's love for us? Do we truly feel it in the pit of our stomachs? Do we get giddy with excitement when we realize that the God of the Universe, of everything that we see and can't see, loves us completely, absolutely and without limit?

I struggle with this. How can a being so great, so immeasurable, so powerful, give a penny for little, insignificant, sinful me? How can a being who made all the heavens and all the earth and everything that resides therein give a thought, much less a second thought, about me?

But He does. That's why He created us. Imagine God, before He created the universe, God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in perfect unity, in perfect love, decided to love us into existence. He loves us just as we are, just where we are, just when we are.

And in His love, He gives us Free Will, to love Him back, if we so choose. But our love back is not a condition of His love for us. That's what is so confusing, so hard to fully understand. And that's the message in today's Gospel. Jesus gives us not one, but three examples of God's unconditional, perfect love for you and you and you and, yes, even me.

What reasonable shepherd would leave 99 to find one lost sheep?

What logical person would turn his house upside down looking for a single coin, and mind you, in His parable, this coin was like a penny to us. And then, when he found it, go crazy with excitement and tell all his friends. You'd think he was a little silly.

What rational father would give his son half his wealth, knowing his son would only squander it on the most hedonistic adventure?

In this third example, what do you think the father was doing while his son was away? Waiting, longing, craving for his son to return. I can imagine this man's wife begging him to come away from that window to eat a meal or get some rest. Not this father. No. He wasn't able because of his love for his son. He loves his son, even in his son's hedonistic absence.

That's the love God has for us. He loves us just as we are, sins and all, weak and falling. Yes, He loves us when we do good, and He loves us when we fail. Isn't that amazing?

And do you know who hates us? The evil one; the devil. God's greatest angel, fallen because of pride. Lucifer hates us because God loves us. But even the devil's hatred for us cannot come close to the love God has for us. Because God's love is infinite and perfect. Lucifer's hatred for us is limited by his created nature. God is love.

God shows His love for us in every way. The next breath you take is known to God. The next thought in your head is known to God. And He desires that, relishes that, craves that. All He wants is to love us. And as we are made in the image and likeness of God, we, too, are love.

Even when we fail, God gives us the means to reconcile with Him. In His love, He gave us the Sacraments to remain close to Him and each other. His love for us isn't contingent on our receiving the Sacraments; He made the Sacraments so we could be open to and receive His love.

In Baptism, our soul is repaired so as to receive the graces God so desires us to receive. In Confession, we are reconciled to God and to our neighbor. In the Eucharist, we receive spiritual nourishment that strengthens us and we enter into the most intimate communion with Christ; we become one with Him and each other.

In Mass, we pray together, with each other and with all the angels and saints. We receive God in Word and Sacrament. We worship the God of the universe. In doing so, we are prepared, body and soul, to enter into the world to be Christ for one another.

And all of this is voluntary. All of this is aside to the reality that God loves us as we are.

When we are dismissed today to go into the world, whether we got anything out of this hour or not, God loves us. When we go home or to the restaurant or to the game, God loves us. Whether we take time to reflect on our experience here or forget it once we are out the door, God loves us.

That's the message. And we can do with it what we want, because God love's us so much that He gave us the option of accepting or rejecting that love. It's up to us how we respond. That's why it is so important that we first recognize that no matter where we are, what we are doing or how badly we've behaved, first and foremost, God loves you.