



Come and See!

February 3, 2019

The Word...

“Brothers and sisters:
Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts.
But I shall show you a still more excellent way.
If I speak in human and angelic tongues,
but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal.
And if I have the gift of prophecy, and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge;
if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast,
but do not have love, I gain nothing.”
(from 1 Cor 12:31-13:13)

Pondering the Word...

If you are reading this before hearing it at Mass or services this weekend, I encourage you to really listen carefully to Paul’s beautiful words. Yes, we have heard them umpteen times, but try to focus on the meaning they can have in your own life.

Paul talks about striving for great spiritual gifts. We strive a lot, don’t we? To strive means to put out effort, to struggle and to fight for something. The literal Greek translation of the word in this passage is “zEloute” — “to be boiling,” zealous for the graces of great gifts in service of the Lord. I can surely identify with the idea of “boiling” over something, but it is not always for spiritual gifts! And even when it is, I admit it sometimes seeks its own interests for approval and recognition.

It seems so much of our striving is not about moving mountains, but just making it through the day unscathed. For parents, getting everyone where they are supposed to be, on time, fed, and in the right sports uniform or with the right study materials is an accomplishment. But I wonder: how much of our striving has its genesis in real, true love, the way Paul defines it? How much of our striving is due to our own expectations or those of our culture, or to the pressure of trying to keep up or to look good in the eyes of others? I reflect on my own experiences in parenting and the times all that striving could have been abated if I had just been able to look through the eyes of patient, kind, humble, unselfish love? What might I have done differently?

What might you and I do differently today if real love were to become the wellspring of all that we strive for?

Living the Word...

*“Oh do you have time to linger for just a little while out of your busy and very important day for the goldfinches that have gathered in a field of thistles for a musical battle, to see who can sing the highest note, or the lowest, or the most expressive of mirth, or the most tender? ▪ Their strong, blunt beaks drink the air as they strive melodiously not for your sake and not for mine and not for the sake of winning but for sheer delight and gratitude – ‘believe us, they say, it is a serious thing just to be alive on this fresh morning in the broken world.’ ▪ I beg of you, do not walk by without pausing to attend to this rather ridiculous performance. It could mean something. It could mean everything. It could be what Rilke meant, when he wrote: ‘You must change your life.’” (Mary Oliver, 1935-2019, Rest in Peace; “Invitation” from *A Thousand Mornings*, New York: Penguin Books, 2013).*

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Feb 4: *"I have not time to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson...David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, did what was righteous...out of weakness they were made powerful, strong in battle..."* (Heb 11:32-40)

The author of Hebrews is recounting the great figures in the Old Testament, the "cloud of witnesses" who persevered, trusting in God's promises that were heard but not seen in their lifetimes. I think of my own impatience with what I see in the world. It seems we are headed in the wrong direction, moving away from God. I have to remind myself that I in fact am living in a time of the fulfilled promise; that Christ is alive today, in me and in the cloud of witnesses worldwide who, weak though we are, attest to his presence. It's easy to fall into the trap of bitterness and weariness. We too are called to persevere. If you are struggling to hold onto hope, pray to have the faith of the ancients, imperfect but enduring. Hold onto God's promises.

Feb 5: *"May your hearts be ever merry!"* (Ps 22)

What a lovely verse from Psalm 22...the psalm which opens with the line, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!" So many of the psalms follow this same pattern: 'Where are you, God? I am about to be devoured, I am wasting away. Come to my rescue and I will sing your praises to the assembly and we will all be happy and satisfied. And make all of this happen in 32 verses, okay?' This is the leitmotif of the entire Bible, and indeed of our very lives—we fall, we suffer, and with God's help, we rise again. What an important lesson to teach our young people whose expectations are based on immediate gratification, immediate relief of any suffering. Let us all remember to "trust in the slow work of God," and to pray the psalms to remind us of the constancy of God's saving hand.

Feb 6: *"Strive for peace with everyone...See to it that no one be deprived of the grace of God..."* (Heb 12:4-7, 11-15)

Here's that word "strive" again, although this time, the Greek is "diOkete," which means pursuing or chasing. So while there is still effort, at least we are not boiling this time! Keeping peace with everyone is really an effort, and often it eludes us, so we have to be aware when it is slipping from our grasp. The second part of this verse is similar, warning the community it is easy for its members to fall away from God's grace and disrupt the peace. This is an apt passage when our institutions seem to sow discord and division by their actions (or lack thereof). It is up to each of us to work for peace—even among those with whom we disagree--and to be bearers of God's grace when our leadership fails us. Pray today for peace—in our world, in our countries, in our faith communities, in our families, in our souls.

Feb 7: *"...and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled Blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel."* (Heb 12:18-19, 21-24)

"The sprinkled Blood of Jesus that speaks of better things," is another way to translate this verse. Abel's innocent blood speaks of the old covenant, of vengeance, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." Christ's innocent blood speaks of the new covenant, of mercy and forgiveness, "love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you." Which one speaks to you?

Feb 8: *"Let your life be free from love of money but be content with what you have..."* (Heb 13:1-8)

Do you love money? I like to think I'm free of that, but don't try taking it away from me! I have never lived "without." No, I don't love money, but I take it for granted, just like I often take for granted those I love and who love me. At the beginning of the documentary on the Pope, *A Man of His Word*, Francis challenges us to find ways to be a "little bit poorer." You don't have to love money to be under its subtle control. Let's those of us blessed with plenty find ways each day to be just a little bit poorer and a lot more generous.

Feb 9: *"Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."* (Mk 6:30-34)

Well, with all the striving we've done this week, what a wonderful invitation from Jesus! I often come the end of my day or the end of my week, and, despite my advice to the contrary, I can't help but spend some of my Examen time looking at what I didn't do well or missed or could have done better. I wonder: as the Apostles gather to report to Jesus all they have done (doing an Examen!), do they too fall into the trap of focusing on what didn't go so well? Jesus doesn't question them or instruct them or chastise them. He says, "Come away with me and rest awhile," the very words he can say to you each evening if you but allow him to. Turn your day--your successes and failures--over to Jesus tonight and every night. Rest easy in his embrace.