



## Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time C February 3, 2019

- ◆ **Good and Bad Religion**
- ◆ **Rejected by His Own**
- ◆ **Primacy of Love**
- ◆ **Consecration of a Virgin**

The following are some reflections on the Gospel and Second Reading for this Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time. The Gospel recounts the rejection of Jesus by the people of his hometown of Nazareth. The second reading is Paul's famous piece on love.

### **Reflection #1: *Bringing out the best or the worst***

In last Sunday's Gospel, we saw how Jesus preached to his own people in the synagogue at Nazareth. Their first reaction was extremely favorable. They were astonished at the gracious words that came from his lips. Among these were the beautiful words of Isaiah:

*The spirit of the Lord has been given to me.  
He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,  
to bind up hearts that are broken,  
to proclaim liberty to captives,  
to set the downtrodden free,  
and to proclaim to all a year of God's favour.*

The people quickly grasped what he was saying: the messianic vision of pardon, healing, and liberation was about to become a reality. They greeted the news with enthusiasm. Soon, however, things turned ugly, to the point where they wanted to kill him. Why was this?

When he claimed a central role for himself in turning the messianic vision into a reality, their enthusiasm turned into skepticism. They still saw him as just the son of Joseph, a local carpenter. How could such a one as he fulfil the beautiful words of Isaiah? And yet it seemed that he was capable of great things. Indeed, if they could believe what they had heard, he had already done them, but not among them. He had done them in Capernaum. They resented that.

Without showing any real faith in him, they demanded (yes, demanded) that he do in Nazareth some of the great things he had done in Capernaum. His answer was: he couldn't do them because of their lack of faith in him. He did them in Capernaum because people there had faith in him. This didn't go down well with them.

But then he went on to hint at the inclusion of the Gentiles in the messianic blessings, giving two

examples of Gentiles who had been helped by two of their greatest prophets, Elijah and Elisha. (Elijah had saved a Sidonian widow and her son during a famine. Elisha had cured a Syrian general, Naaman, of leprosy.)

It was at this point that things turned ugly. As Jews, they despised Gentiles. In a burst of nationalistic fervor, they turned on him, and hustled him out of the synagogue. Then they took him to the brow of a hill, intending to throw him over, but he escaped through their midst.

If you've ever wondered how such a transparently good person as Jesus ended up being crucified, you need look no further than this incident for the answer. There can be no doubt but that the people of Nazareth really intended to kill him. It probably was not them all, but merely a bunch of bigoted fanatics.

It is a shocking incident. What makes it so shocking is the fact that it was done in the name of religion. Religion is a beautiful thing, but it can get distorted and turn into something repulsive. Then it becomes synonymous with intolerance, fanaticism, and bigotry. Sadly, religion can bring out the worst in people. It can make them more bigoted, and more apt to hate and kill. But religion can also bring out the best in people. It can make them more tolerant and more loving. Religion is beautiful when it is like this.

There is an essential link between faith and love. Faith is important, but love is even more important. St. Paul says: "I may have faith strong enough to move mountains, but if I am without love, I am nothing at all" (Second Reading). Jesus was saddened that because of the people's lack of faith, he wasn't able to do for them what he dearly wanted to do. But he didn't get embittered and bury his gifts. He did what he could for the few who believed in him, and then took his gifts elsewhere.

### **Reflection #2: *Rejected by His own***

Years after leaving his native village in the Transkei, Nelson Mandela returned home for a visit. By now he was a lawyer and lived in Johannesburg. Of that visit he later wrote: "There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have changed. The old place went on as before, no different from when I had grown up there. But I realized that my own outlook and world views had evolved."

In effect, what he was saying was that, while it was nice to go back home, he could no longer live there—it

had become too small for him. Away from home one can be the person one wants to be.

Jesus went back to Nazareth and to the people among whom he had grown up. He wanted to bring them to the benefit of his gifts. They were the people who knew him best. You would have thought, then, that they would have appreciated him most. Sadly, they had no faith in him.

The view you get of a great cathedral from a distance is very different from the view you get from close up. From a distance, the cathedral stands resplendent in its setting. You can see its outline, its form, and its beauty. But from close up, all you see is the grime and the cracks that time inflicts on even the greatest building.

Something similar happens with people. A person is never a hero to his own relations. A genius is not likely to be discovered by his friends. The person near at hand suffers because his faults and limitations are clearly visible. The person far away, on the other hand, is held in esteem because only his virtues are visible.

But what happened to Jesus at Nazareth went deeper than this. It wasn't just a case of them not appreciating him. They rejected him. Why? Because he pointed out their lack of faith, and told them that the Gentiles were more open to God than they were. And that the messianic blessings were meant not just for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles.

Jesus suffered the fate of all prophets —rejection by his own people. Prophecy is not about pleasing people. It's about speaking the truth that no one wants to hear, the truth that is often covered up. But Jesus' overriding motive was one of compassion.

What was he to do? He might have said, "To heck with them! To heck with everybody!" and then retired to a shack in the woods, and let the weeds grow at the gate.

Or he could have said, "What do they want?" and having found out what they wanted, he could have given it to them. But in that case the special gift he wanted to give them, and which they sorely needed, would be lost.

Finally, he could have tried to find even a few who were ready to receive what he wanted to give them. If he found a few, he could give it to them, and in proportion to their ability to receive. This is what he chose to do.

It's very hurtful to be rejected by one's own. Jesus was saddened by what happened to him at Nazareth, but he didn't get embittered and bury his gifts. He did what he could for those who believed in him at Nazareth, and then took his gifts elsewhere.

### **Reflection #3: *The primacy of love***

There is an essential link between faith and love. This is illustrated in the following story. George Herbert was an English priest, who was also a poet and amateur musician. One day on his way to a music session with

some of his friends, he came upon a poor man whose horse had fallen under his load. Both man and horse were in distress and in urgent need of help.

Herbert took off his clerical robes and helped the man to unload the horse, get him on his feet, and then load him up again. Then he gave the man some money to refresh himself and his horse. That done, he sent out again to keep his appointment with his friends.

Normally, he kept himself neat and trim. So when he turned up with his hands dirty and his clothes soiled, his friends were very surprised. When he told them the cause of it, one of them expressed disapproval that he should get himself involved in such a dirty job.

But he answered, "The thought of what I have done will be like music to me at midnight. The omission of it would have caused discord in my conscience. For if I am bound to pray for all who are in distress, I am sure that I am bound so far as it is in my power to practice what I pray for." Having delivered that little 'sermon' he said, "And now, let's tune our instruments."

In today's Second Reading, St. Paul gives us what is acknowledged to be one of the finest descriptions of love ever written. Love is a much-used word today. But what our culture calls love, in its songs and films, frequently is not love at all; it is the opposite to love. It is desire and control and possessiveness.

Today, many are skeptical about the existence of real love. One reason for this is that today we have a better understanding of the complexity of human nature, and the mixed motives behind everything we do.

St. Paul was well aware of the mixed motives behind the good that people do. He understood how people could make great sacrifices, yet those sacrifices are worthless because they are done from motives of self-interest.

But he still believed in the possibility of real love. And he emphasized the primacy of love in the life of a Christian. What he proposes in his description of love is clearly an ideal. An ideal is like a star. Though we can never reach it, it still guides us. But we must be willing to try. And we must not be discouraged by our failures.

To be possessed with love is to be filled with a power which will not be denied; a power that will do anything, brave anything, suffer anything, and endure anything, for the sake of who or what it loves.

Love, kindness, and charity—these are the essential qualities. Love never fails. Other things fade and pass away, but love endures. If a person truly loves, he/she possesses all other virtues as well.

Faith, hope and love are the three great virtues. But the greatest of these is love. All things pass away, but the kind word and the kind deed never pass away.

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## ***Consecration to a Life of Virginity***

### **Marianne Seraphine Cano (Ascension Parishioner)**

This past January 19 at St. James Cathedral in Orlando, Ascension parishioner Marianne Cano was *consecrated a virgin*. Marianne is the first woman in the history of our diocese to be publicly consecrated as a virgin. This is an ancient ritual of our Church that was restored after Vatican II in 1970. Marianne has been a member of our parish since 2014. She works as a physical therapist. If you have any questions about Marianne's chosen way of life, you can contact her at [mcano@lasalette.us](mailto:mcano@lasalette.us).

#### **How is this different than other religious life?**

Consecrated virgins do not use the title "Sister" and while they may spend time with other consecrated virgins for friendship and support, they live their vocation individually. These women have careers much like any other lay person and the local diocese is not financially responsible for them. They are also not restricted to any particular apostolate, meaning they may choose their own way to serve with their God-given talents. However, a consecrated virgin has a particular focus on prayer and supporting the needs of her diocese through a spiritual bond with her bishop.

#### **What is love? Children know.**

Children, ages 4 to 8, were asked, "What does love mean?" Here are some of their answers:

1. "When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis, too. That's love."

- Rebecca, age 8

2. "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth."

- Billy, age 4

3. "Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other."

- Karl, age 5

4. "Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK."

- Danny, age 7

5. "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."

- Bobby, age 7

6. "If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend whom you hate."

- Nikka, age 6

7. "Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day."

- Noelle, age 7

8. "I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones."

- Lauren, age 4

9. "Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs."

- Chrissy, age 6

10. "Love is what makes you smile when you're tired."

- Terri, age 4

Have a blessed week,

