

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
ROMANS 8.18 St. LUKE 6.36

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Love God with our whole being and love our neighbors in the same way we want to be loved...the Great Commandment...heard at the beginning of every Mass...it is our RULE of life.

We spend a lot of time in Church talking about love...God's love for us...our love for him...and how we are supposed to be loving each other. When it comes to loving others...with the same unconditional love Jesus shows us...we try to find wiggle room...selectively applying love to people we actually like.

Today's Gospel from Luke parallels some of Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms...if we don't show love and compassion toward others...we can't fully experience the love and compassion God has toward us.

Christian love is all about doing what's best for others. We are supposed to follow the example Jesus set for us and apply our love toward others unconditionally. Quite often, though, we place unreasonable expectations on other people as conditions for receiving our love...we judge them by our own standards...not God's.

Jesus tells us to be merciful like God is merciful...not to judge others and God will not judge us...not to condemn others and God will not condemn us...and we can expect God to apply the same standards to us we apply to others.

There is a distinction between judging another person's unacceptable behavior and condemning that person to hell for all time because of their bad behavior.

When we are confronted with someone who is clearly engaged in actions that are self-destructive and destructive toward others...we have an obligation to help them sort things out...when possible. This is especially true within the Church. But whatever action we take must be done out of love and a genuine desire to help the person...not because we feel morally better.

We are most likely to be overly critical of another person's bad behavior when we see something of our own bad behavior in that person. If we expect to help others we must first get our own house in order...get rid of things blocking our way and keeping us from fully experiencing God's love...only then are we in a position to help others.

Jesus tells a story about saying something to a friend who has a speck of dust in his eye..."Let me help you take that speck out of your eye"...and we ignore the ten-foot log in our own eye. How can we expect to help the guy with a speck of dust in his eye when we can't see straight because of the big log in our eyes? We can't, and that's why we rely on God's mercy and compassion and love to lead us so we can lead others to him.

One of the most-popular songs from 1972 was *I Can See Clearly Now* by African-American pop singer Johnny Nash. It's a song about the rain stopping...the rainbow appearing in the sky...breaking into a bright sunny day...and all obstacles blocking his path now clearly visible.

Nash's song isn't about the Gospel, but there is a certain amount of truth in many secular songs. The Gospel is about asking God to remove the obstacles that are in our way that keep us from fully experiencing his love. It's only when we get rid of those obstacles we are in a position to help others get rid of theirs...so they too can experience God's love.

Saint Paul tells us to expect obstacles in this lifetime but not to get discouraged. We do want to try to avoid them because they make us fall down. And we can't ignore them...then we risk making others fall down too...and that is not showing love or compassion...it a from of self-righteousness and it's hypocritical.

Love God with our whole being and love our neighbors in the same way we want to be loved...not a suggestion for a better life...our RULE of life. Everything we do depends on it!

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