

Measuring Rod of our Spiritual Life

February 1, 1998 - Fourth Sunday Ordinary Time, Cycle C

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19 1 Cor. 12:31-13:13 Luke 4:21-30

Today is a very difficult homily to give. We need to talk about what it is that Jesus Christ calls us to in the second reading. Let's look at 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13. It really starts at Chapter 12:31. Paul writes: "Set your hearts on the greater gifts." Here we are, a community that uses the charismatic gifts, and Paul has just finished talking about these gifts and will talk about them later, but here he says that's all very nice, use them. I'm saying to you the very same thing: that's all very nice. Use them. Good. "But set your heart on the higher gifts and I will show you a way that surpasses all the others."

"If I speak with human tongues" -- as I'm doing right now -- "or angelic" -- when we praise in the gift of tongues -- and a lot of us here do it and ooh, aren't we excited -- " but do not do it with love I am a noisy gong, a clanging symbol". Clang! Clang! Clang! Do you ever hear any clanging here? What a challenge this is to me? Here I am being a person of the cloth if you will, if I am a priest and I offer the gift of the altar but do it without love, I am nothing! If I come to church week after week and I sing praises to the Lord, but do it without love, I am nothing! The whole core of Christianity is summed up in love!

If you ever examine our Mass, never once in the Mass do we say "I love you" to God and this has troubled me for a long time. So I once asked a Bishop who used to be head of the liturgy in the United States why never once in Mass do we as a people look to God as a community and say, "God, I love you." We are called to love God with all our heart, our mind, our soul and all our strength and not once in Mass, the greatest of all prayers, do we tell God that we love him. He didn't have an answer. There is such a need in our lives to cry out to God, "I love you." Think about how many times in your prayer that you tell God that you love him. The most wonderful prayer we can pray is "Jesus, I love you" because he's always saying that to us. He's using our names and saying, "N.N., I love you."

Let's go on... Jesus said that all people will know you are my disciples by your love for one another. That was the only thing he used as his measuring rod about how someone would know we were followers of his or not.

Let's go to John's gospel 15:9: As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. He tells us very clearly that he loves us. Everyone remembers that the last words persons speak before they die are remembered and Jesus knows that he is going to die and so he says, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you." Think about that. The same love that God the Father has for Jesus Christ, he has for us. Does God the Father love Jesus Christ more than he loves you? The answer to that is "No! Absolutely not!" If we only realized how much God loves us we would all be saints. If you and I would meditate on the reality that we are loved by God the Father just as much as God loves his son Jesus -- WITH THE SAME LOVE! Jesus said, "As the Father has loved ME, I love you. Live in my

love! All this I tell you that my joy may be yours and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment" period. (verse 12) When we come to church on Sunday morning and ask what am I supposed to do, Jesus says, "This is my commandment. That you love one another as I have loved you."

If I were to drop dead right now, what would people say about me? What would they say about you? Would they say you were very committed? Very nice. Would they say he had the gift of healing? I'm excited. If they said, you should have heard them speak in tongues? Whoooo. Or would they say of you and me that person was a very loving person? If they wouldn't, then we have some changing to do. Let's go back to 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13, verse 4 and following and do this.

I hate this part, so bear with me. "Love is patient!" We're supposed to be able to put our names, if we are followers of Jesus Christ, in this and say, I am patient. Larry is patient. Well, sometimes. "Love is kind." Can I say that I am kind? "Love is not jealous". Am I not jealous? "Love is never rude." O-o-o, am I never rude? "It is not selfish or self-seeking." Am I not selfish or not self-seeking? Please, don't sit there and say right away, "No! I'm not that way!" Get a life. Know who you are. I, at least, know that I am a miserable irritable son of a so and so sometimes. That can free me from stop being that way. But if you don't even realize that sometimes you're like this there is no hope for you. It's like people coming to confession. "It's been six months since my last confession and I got angry a few times." "Is that all?" They can actually say, "Yes, Father." They haven't a clue, if that's all.

Go through this. Examine your conscience. Are you always kind? Always gentle? Always not rude? Always not selfish? "Love is not prone to anger." I can't survive a day without going through that one. "Neither does it brood over injuries." Do I brood over injuries? "Love does not rejoice in what is wrong, but rejoices in the truth." Hopefully, most of us can say we rejoice in the truth.

There is no limits to MY forbearance, to MY trust, to MY hope, to MY power to endure. You and I really need to examine our lives, not to put it to the people around us. Sometimes we examine our lives by what we are doing to people around us, and the people around us don't live like us and they don't praise like us and so we must be doing pretty good. Then we fall into spiritual pride and that's going to take us down. You and I need to take our lives and put it next to the example of the crucified one and there we will always fall short and there our love will be nothing and we will always know how much farther we must go. How much more we must do with our lives.

It all comes down to John 15: There is no greater love than this. To lay down one's life for one's friend. You are my friend. What Jesus calls you and what he calls me to do is to lay down our lives. If I am to be a person of love I must lay down my life. Jeremiah in the first reading today was called to lay down his life. Jesus, after he says what was said in the gospel today -- this was fulfilled in your midst -- and spoke God's word in love, they were going to kill him right there. He was willing to lay down his life. You and I are called to live a life of love, and living a life of love means well beyond being patient and

kind, it means that I would be willing to die for God and to die for you. If I would be willing to die for you, then I can be patient because that's where it is because I must be ready to die to myself so I can live for you. I have to be more concerned about you than I am about me. That's what it is to die. That's what each of us is called to do -- to die because love means to give away our lives. That's what Christ calls us to do. Are you willing to do it?

May each of you know his love today and forever. Amen.