

Sermon
Proper 25
Deuteronomy 34:1-12
Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8
Matthew 22:34-46

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Matthew 22:34-46

In August of this year, I was invited to attend a week long, silent retreat. On that retreat, I was asked to be one of the Spiritual Directors. There were five Spiritual Directors, and I was the newest one, the other four Spiritual Directors had been on this particular silent retreat before, and was familiar with everyone on the retreat. I was assigned four directees. I knew from the start that these four directees that were assigned to me were not very happy, or should I say, were not very pleased to have been assigned to me.

Being the newest person to the group, I understood perfectly well, the displeasure of these four directees. I understood perfectly well, their questioning of my ability, and my qualifications, to be an effective Spiritual Director.

I knew that these four unhappy directees were going to present me with the biggest challenge, that they could muster up between them.

Before meeting with each one of my directees, I sat in my room, and asked God for guidance, and to open up my heart, to see each one as God's child, and to willingly accept the challenge that I knew was waiting for me.

As I met with each one of my directees, I was presented with a challenge. Each one came with their own agenda. Each one came with their own tricky situation to see if they could stump me, and to prove me incapable of being assigned to them as their Spiritual Director.

I have to honestly say that I was very annoyed with each of my directees, and it took all of my energy not to show my annoyance with them. It also took all of my energy not to ask them why did they feel the need to present me with such an outrageous challenge, and not trust in my ability of being an effective Spiritual Director.

At the end of each session, I went back to my room, and had an even longer talk with God. I asked God to give me the patience, and are you sure you knew what you were

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doing, when you called me to this particular ministry?

I thought about Saint Paul, and how after his conversion, he also had to prove himself to the other twelve apostles. I thought to myself, if Paul had to prove himself, who am I?

I also thought to myself that we are all children of God, and we are all heirs to the throne. Why do we (humans) allow our egos to get in our way? Why is it so hard for us (humans) to accept each other for who we are? Children of God!

We heard in today's gospel that the Pharisees had gathered together to challenge Jesus. We are told that a lawyer asked Jesus a question to test him. The Pharisees were very powerful leaders in the temple. The lawyers were those who knew the laws inside and out. Remember that there were over six hundred laws that God handed down to the Israelites.

Here was Jesus, a son of a carpenter, going around speaking with authority, healing people of their illnesses, giving sight to the blind, casting out demons, and raising people from the dead. Here was Jesus bringing spiritual food to those who were considered to be outcast. Here was Jesus, this “no body” causing all of this disturbance, and making the Pharisees and the Sadducees, these authority figures, look pretty bad in front of the common folks.

It was no wonder that they tried to make him look bad in front of everyone. It was no wonder that they tried to challenge his authority. Again, I ask the question of why is it so hard for us (humans) to accept each other for who we are? Why do we (humans) allow our egos to get in the way?

When asked which commandment in the laws was the greatest? Jesus responded with a simple four letter word, “LOVE.” Love God with all your heart, soul and mind. Also love your neighbor as yourself.

The word Love is a very simple word, but it is the hardest thing to do. Saint Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians, “Love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude, love does not insist on its own way, love is not irritable or resentful, love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, love rejoices in the truth, love bears all things, love believes in all things, love hopes in all things, and endures all things. Love never ends.”

I truly believe that in order to truly love, there has to be some sort of an acceptance. I recently read in one of those twelve step books, “Acceptance is the answer to all of our problems today. When someone is disturbed, it is because they found a person, place, or

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thing, or a certain situation, or some fact of their life unacceptable to them, and that they would not find any serenity until they were able to accept that person, place, thing or situation as being exactly the way it was supposed to be at that moment.”

It is truly hard to accept life on life's terms, Jesus even struggled with acceptance, when he was agonizing in the garden on Holy Thursday, but in the end, Jesus was able to forgive and to ask his Heavenly Father, to forgive those who persecuted him. In the end, Jesus was able to accept what was waiting for him. Jesus was able to accept what God had sent him here on earth to do.

We are all called, by our Baptism, to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves, and to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. We are not called by our Baptism to allow our egos to get into our way or to boast or try to trick or challenge or disrespect each other.

We are all called to Love as Jesus Loved, Unconditionally! Love grows from within . The more we allow that love to grow, the more we will be able to accept one another, and the more we will be able to share that unconditional love with each other.

At the end of my silent retreat, I was able, with God's help, to stand up and meet the challenge of my four directees. I was also able, with God's help, to ask each one of my directees, a question, not to challenge them, but to make them think about the Christ that lives deep within their hearts, and to remember whose they were.

Jesus was able to silence the Sadducees and the Pharisees with his questions not so much to test or stump them, but to make them think about who they were, (leaders in the temple) and how foolish they were making themselves look in front of the common folks.

We are all called to Love unconditionally.

In today's society how can we as Baptized Christians meet that challenge?
How can we, as Baptized Christians, living in today's world, allow our egos to decrease and that special love, towards each other, increase in our hearts?

I would like to end with a familiar prayer and food for thought:

“God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change the things I can; and the Wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did,

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this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right. If I surrender to His Will; so that I may be reasonable happy in this life, and supremely happy with Him forever and ever in the next.” Amen.