

**October 29, 2017  
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Our hearts seek you, Lord, and rejoice. We love you, Lord.  
We ring out our joy and exult in your name.**

*"The experience of missing love is itself the work of love"*

### **Claiming Our True Self**

Seeking the Lord and rejoicing together in his name is our true nature and condition. The scriptures back this up. Paul in Romans in 5:20 tells us where sin abounds, grace more abounds. Jesus at the Last Supper, knowing what lay before him, still gave thanks before sharing his bread with his followers. Joyfully celebrating love with each other is the destiny for which we are all being created.

This is good news, it is wonderful to be reminded of this, especially when we find ourselves in difficult straits. But where is the joy then? What is the place of suffering in the divine plan when we face difficulties?

A key in answering this is to remember that we don't have joy *in spite of* our suffering, we find joy *because* of them. Let's look at this some more

### **A Living Testimony**

Last Sunday we listened the story of a young man, - I'll call him Joe - who has known terrible suffering in his life and still is filled with joy and love. He told us of an incident which happened in his youth in which his father, who was a policemen, was shot in the face by a young boy with mental problems whom he was trying to help. Joe's father was paralyzed and is unable to walk, eat or talk. One can only imagine what the horror of such a thing would do to anyone, especially a young boy.

For upwards of two decades, Joe carried an anger and hate that was meant to kill, including that boy as well as himself. He did everything one does when trying to run away from the pain - addictions and destructive behavior of every kind one can only imagine.

Some twenty years later he heard someone speaking of Jesus' love for us from his Cross, and something radically changed in his heart. He was moved from bitterness to forgiveness, from hate to love. Joe reunited with his wife and family and became friends with the young man who did the shooting those terrible years before. In fact they speak to each other every seek, ending with how much they love each other. Who could have imagined this could have happened. How do we understand such a dramatic change could have happened.

There is a tradition found among the great mystics which sheds light on how this could have happened. Theresa of Avila in the 16th century in Spain said, "*The experience of missing love is the work of love.*" John of the Cross from the same century in Spain said, "*Love awakens us, not to whether we are holier than others, but to how holy everybody is.*" Terese of Lisieux, the uneducated young 24 year old woman in France who has been declared a Doctor of the Church, which means her teachings are trustworthy, said, "*It is our faults and our weakness that bring us to God, not our perfection and our strength.*"

What are they getting at - that "*the experience of missing love is itself the work of love.*" In other words, the discomfort of *not* loving motivates one to seek the joy and comfort of loving. It's all a work of grace. The discomfort Joe felt at hating that young boy became so strong that he was unable to live with it any longer. Love had never deserted him during those awful years, it kept working on him until he was finally opened to receive it, and his life was changed to one of love, compassion and forgiveness. Joe's experience of missing love was itself the work of love.

Loving others is our true nature and condition, even in suffering. Christ doesn't protect us *from* suffering, Christ saves us *through* suffering. It's not that we seek to be delivered *from* evil, it's that we pray to be delivered *through* evil. We can either try to run away from the pain, or we can reach out to Christ and receive the comfort of being taken into healing and hope.

Joe's is the familiar story of addiction. As long as he tried to bury the pain or run away from it, it held power over him. It was when he turned and faced it that he was freed from it.

Who could not be inspired such a story, but what helps open us up to this way of seeing? Keeping our eyes fixed on the Cross helps see past the darkness. It's like watching the recent eclipse of the sun. We didn't look at the moon, we looked for the sun behind the moon. We knew there was light behind that darkness. Suffering is simply the eclipse of love. Like the sun, we know the light is always there.

Living in the light is following Christ's command to love - like Joe, like that young boy - living with people of all colors, religions and nationalities, celebrating with them in times of light, crying with them in times of dark, all the while singing with them together:

*"Alleluia from Head to Toe!" - - - Amen? Amen!*