

Fourth Sunday In Ordinary Time
Sunday 31 January 2010

Today's second reading probably sounds familiar to many of you. We sometimes call it the "Wedding reading" because the vast majority of couples getting married choose that reading for their wedding. In fact, if you have had the good fortune of attending a large number of weddings, you can probably recite that reading in your sleep.

But you know the funny thing is, as much as we talk about love in our society, as much as it comes up in our movies, our books, and the songs we listen to, you would think that we would all be experts on the subject. But instead, it seems like it is just the opposite because many people are truly confused about this thing we call love. In fact, in many cases, love has become a word that is thrown around and overused so much, its almost as if the word has become a cliché and has lost its meaning.

In truth, love is a difficult reality to understand, yet we have no difficulty knowing it when we are truly loved. Love is a difficult thing to do really well, and yet we still demand it from others. And unconditional love is even difficult for us to accept, and yet nevertheless, it is the one thing in life that we all desire.

Because of these contradictions, we can sometimes lose sight of our priorities. When St. Paul wrote today's reading, he wasn't addressing couples seeking to get married, believe it or not, instead he was writing to the Christian community in Corinth because they were squabbling over rank and privilege, and they were competing against one another over their various spiritual gifts. Therefore, St. Paul has to remind them that none of those things mean a thing if you can't give of yourselves, and be of service to others rather than being of service only to yourself.

True love is a radical gift of self to another. Jesus dying on the cross for our sakes is the ultimate example of what real love is about. We often times have this romanticized view of love. We think about how wonderful it feels, how beautiful it is, and that's all nice, but we fail to comprehend the deepest reality of love, that love is about dying to oneself, its about sacrificing oneself for the sake of another. When you think about love in those terms, it kind of loses its glamour, and so as a result people become focused on feelings, rather than on the hard work of giving up on selfish desires.

When you put what I have said to the test, it becomes very evident that this is all too true. I mean look at for example how most people in our society today view things like priestly celibacy. A lot of people for example want to see married clergy, not to say that that is good or bad, but you have to ask yourself why. You see, there are a lot of reasons out there for and against, but I would maintain that when you get at the heart of what its really all about for most people who want to

see married clergy, I think you will find in all honesty its ultimately because people don't see the value in celibacy, and I think that is where the real problem lies concerning this subject.

What people don't get is that when I agreed to be celibate, what I'm doing is supposed to be a witness and an act of love. I mean first of all, scripture tells us that Jesus did institute this way of life for those who are called to it and can do it. No, of course its not for everyone, but it is for some. And so you have to know that what I'm saying is that I'm so confident in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior who is the ultimate truth, and that God really is our number one priority in life, that I'm willing to forgo what many consider to be one of the greatest goods there is, which is marital love, to prove that you can be happy giving yourself over totally to the Lord and following his Word. These other things that we have in this world are great, but by themselves, they can not totally fulfill us, the one thing we can't do without, no matter who we are, is God. God is our first priority. You have to know that there is no way I would be doing this if I didn't believe wholeheartedly in God and in Jesus Christ and in his kingdom and his Word. And so as a witness to this fact, I as a leader in the church am putting my money where my mouth is and focusing my whole life on the one thing that we can't do without, to show you it's all true what we say about Jesus Christ and what he has done for us.

And sure it's a sacrifice at times, (sometimes its not, really) and that's the point. Ideally, I'm doing this out of love for Jesus Christ and his body the church. I'm giving my whole self over to him in service of him and the church. I'm giving my whole life over to you and to God. Not that I always do this perfectly, God knows that I am not perfect, but at least, that is what it is supposed to be about, that is the ideal that we are striving for here. And so on your part, you're supposed to take that example and run with it. You are to sacrifice yourselves, or give of yourselves if you will, for God, and for the sake of other people - in your marriages, in your families and in your relationships. You should be inspired to love through the example of priestly celibacy, which could be viewed I suppose as a heroic, knight-in-shining armor kind of witness to the kingdom of God and the saving power of God's love. It's too bad that I have to explain this, but many people really don't understand it because they don't understand the true nature of love. The more you are given over to selfish desires, the less you understand love, then the less heroic examples are going to make sense to you. That's why many people don't care to see the kind of example that I'm giving as a celibate. They don't think to equate love with sacrifice, or giving something up for the sake of another, and so therefore in their eyes, celibacy is not love, it's just weird.

That is why it is so important for me to tell you, if we are to learn how to love, if it is true that our goal in life is not simply to be of service to ourselves, then we need to turn to the cross, and make that the centerpiece of our lives. Truth be told,

love comes from God, and so we can't learn love without imitating Him, and inviting Him deeply into our lives. That's why we are here hopefully, because without God, we can easily become shackled by the selfishness that ultimately causes us to be alone. That is not what we are meant to be about, and the more we learn and implement that lesson in life, the better off we become. We are meant to learn how to love in the way that Jesus has loved us because that is what real love is all about.

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