

Homily 7th Sunday of Easter

I may have shared this before with you. I have a friend who was a grumpy individual. He was one of the most negative and pessimistic of people always seeing 'the glass half empty.' He was awkward socially and could be difficult and stubborn in his relationships. There was a sudden transformation in him and I was keen to know if some Damascus Road miracle had happened. He was now the exact opposite of before - positive, jovial, understanding, open to others and 'the life and soul of the party.' Eventually, all became clear as he had met the girl of his dreams and had finally found LOVE.

LOVE is at the centre of The Priestly Prayer of Christ in The Farewell Discourses of St John's Gospel. All Christ wished from His followers was that they loved others as His Father loved Him. The plea of Christ to His Father is that the disciples be ONE - of one mind and heart and purpose. Division and broken relationships amongst them must not be tolerated as Jesus prays for unity and trust in the lives of His followers.

In The First Reading from Acts of The Apostles St Luke describes the death of St Stephen, the first martyr. Stephen obviously was ONE with Christ and loved as Christ loved giving up his life for the sake of The Gospel. As he died Stephen proclaims: 'I see the heavens thrown open and the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God.' Paul witnessed Stephen's stoning and was in agreement with the cruel death sentence. The Pharisee, Paul wished to eradicate the name of Christ from history but eventually LOVE would get in the way and Paul would undergo a radical conversion on The Damascus Road.

In today's Second Reading from St John's Book of Revelation the theme of the heavenly vision continues with the warning that Christ will return and only those 'washed their robes clean in the blood of the Lamb will enter the gates of the heavenly city.' In other words it is those who have tried to love as Christ loved us who will inherit eternal life.

St Paul for all his faults and persecution of Christians found LOVE because Christ first loved him. On his journey to Damascus he responded to that love and allowed himself to be transformed into a fearless Apostle of Christ.

LOVE is the most powerful medicines one can accept from God. As the well renowned Catholic clinical psychologist J. Brennan Mullaney states at the beginning of his classic work 'Authentic Love':

'Love is the fundamental drive and highest goal of human life...the Alpha and Omega of every human act. Love is the most elemental human need, the raw force of the psychospiritual heart from which is derived all emotion, all thought, all volition and all behaviour'.

St Paul's transformation, my friend's radical change in behaviour and the conversion of so many saints is evidence of the power of God's love, that LOVE is God and those who LOVE live in God and God Lives in them. Remember it's lived out LOVE and not labels (like Catholic, Christian, Jew) that will allow us entry into God's Kingdom.