

HOMILY for 4th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME - Year C

A woman loved to sing and decided to try out for the church choir. Every night she would practice and as soon as she began singing, the family dog began to howl loudly.

After a few nights of this, her husband has had enough.

“For goodness’ sake, dear!” her husband shouted, “Can you please sing something the dog doesn’t know?”

We all wish to be blessed with gifts & talents. Those will bring us lots of wonderful blessings & add some glamor to our lives. We praise people with great talents & admire folks with amazing gifts. We know that most people are not born with those talents & gifts. They learn & work hard to achieve certain gifts & talents over time. But, those gifts & talents can do amazing things & create wonderful results. Those results can be in science, arts, music, sports, cooking, & so on. Like those aspects of our daily life, our spiritual life has brought out many amazing Christians with all sorts of spiritual gifts. We call those Christians saints or holy figures. We look up to them as our role models & admire their ways of life amidst a secular, challenging world. Obviously, Jesus is at the top of those saints & holy figures. We want to imitate these heroic figures because they are close to God. We believe that saints are the reflection of God on earth. They’re our connection to the world of Heaven. Another reason we want to imitate saints is because their virtuous ways of life bring us true peace & happiness & help us create a loving & harmonious community. So, saints hold the secrets to this life and the next.

Having said all of that, we are not surprised to see Paul point us in the direction of the saints & talk about “higher gifts” in this Sunday’s Second Reading. Here’s how Paul explains that idea to us, “Set your hearts on the greater gifts. Now I will show you the way which surpasses all the others.” So, Paul encourages us to yearn & search for greater gifts, & not for worldly things. Unfortunately, many Christians continue to look for lowly things such as material things, conservative views, traditional opinions, liberal ideas, progressive choices, & so on. Those things are clearly not virtues or “higher gifts.” Ironically, some Christians have used cultural values like conservative, traditional, liberal, or progressive to be the measurement for holiness.

In case we’ve forgotten some of the Christian virtues or “higher gifts” that Paul talks about, let me name them for you, “wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, & fear of the Lord.” Here are some other virtues for us to consider, “charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, & chastity.” Let me add four more cardinal virtues to that list, “prudence, justice, courage, & temperance.” I scratch my head trying to figure out why Christians do not wholeheartedly search for those virtues. Instead, they’ve fought over cultural values like conservative, traditional, liberal, & progressive. I think they like to do that because they do not have the courage to focus & work hard for those virtues above. For it’s a challenge to master a virtue & make it a part of our lives.

Paul certainly endorses those virtues that I listed for you above. He would encourage all Christians to pursue that Christian treasure & make it a focus of their daily life. However, there is one precious piece of treasure that Paul has put it above everything else, namely, love. Here is how he discusses about love & other virtues in this Sunday’s Second Reading, “...If I speak in human & angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, & comprehend all mysteries & all knowledge; if I have all faith so as

to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own; & if I hand my body over that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing... So, faith, hope, love remain these three; but the greatest of these is love." So, Paul believes that love is the greatest virtue that would complete other virtues & make them perfect. We can feel the value of this virtue when God created us out of love. Then, God's Son decided to enter our world to save us & ultimately offered His life on the Cross because of His love for us. We can see the power of love at work & comes alive through our God in human history.

People have speculated on various reasons why our world has turned violent lately. Every time we turn on the news, we hear about shootings at a school, neighborhood, mall, bar, or holy place. There's no place the world that is free from violence these days. People have lost respect for human life & run out of patience for one another. They get angry easily at one another over various issues. But, none has found a real solution for the random violence around our neighborhood & the world. None has figured out how to help Christians make a difference in our world. Let me make this bold proposal & challenge us to search for virtues & live them out in our daily life. Let's start changing our world by committing ourselves to live a virtuous life & make that change happen with us first. Let's try to convince our world to turn around its dark & violent way of life by following a life of virtues. In case you cannot remember all the virtues, let me name those again for you, "wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord, charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, & chastity." Here are four more cardinal virtues, "prudence, justice, courage, & temperance." Or, Paul summarizes about higher gifts in this way, "Faith, hope, love remain these three. But, the greatest of these is love."

My dear brothers & sisters, I do not know how our virtuous way of life will change our world & make us a better Christian. But, it sure makes our God proud of us & fulfills God's plan for us. This Sunday's First Reading describes that plan as following, "...Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you." So, let's be a prophet & the light to the world by following a virtuous life!