

Father O'Connor's Homily for 3 November 2024
Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time – B

Deuteronomy 6: 2-6
Hebrews 7: 23-28
Mark 12: 28b-34

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today” [Deuteronomy 6: 4-6].

So proclaims Moses in the First Reading from the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, which Jesus quotes in today's Gospel passage from Mark. Then Jesus adds from the Book of Leviticus, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” [Leviticus 19: 18]. And Jesus concludes, “There is no other commandment greater than these.”

When do we find ourselves at the door to this kind of love?

Writer Kathleen Norris tells about a man named Willie who had fallen in with a drug dealer. Willie thought things were going quite well for himself – setting up a network of drug contacts and making some quick big money.

But one day he and the drug dealer were cruising down the street when they spotted a man coming towards them. “I need to kill him,” the drug dealer said coolly, as he reached for his gun.

“It was right then and there that I decided that I needed to get out,” said Willie, badly shaken. “I was in way over my head.”

And that, concludes Kathleen Norris, is when Willie found himself at the door to love – with the sudden awareness that his current path was leading to no good, and then wanting to do whatever it takes to get on the right path.

Stories of the saints and their conversions highlight such an awareness. At one point the saints heard today's Gospel as if for the first time, and they embraced the truth that love of God and love of neighbor are the rock foundation of a meaningful life. The saints humbly realized that they still had far to go – but that God was right there to help them. The saints show us that growing as disciples of Jesus is a graced, patient and lifelong journey.

Rabbi Harold Kushner used to say, “When people ask me, ‘Where is God?’ I tell them that I would rather re-phrase the question to ‘When is God?’”

Where is God? When is God present to you? God is love. God is here.

A woman was complaining, “Why does God seem so far away from me? If only I could feel Him touch me.”

Her friend said to her, “Pray to God and ask Him to touch you.”

So she closed her eyes and began to pray. And then she felt a gentle hand on her shoulder. “He touched me!” she said. Then she opened her eyes and said, “You know, it felt just like your hand on my shoulder.”

Her friend replied, “It was my hand. Do you think God would need to stretch out His arm all the way from heaven just to touch you? Mine was closer, so He used me.”

Where is God? When is God present to you? God is love. God is here.

A woman was working on her master’s degree and commuted several times each week to the university. Coming home late at night, she would see an old man by the side of the road. He was always there, no matter what the weather, no matter how late she returned. She often wondered what brought him to that same spot every night.

She finally asked her neighbor, “Have you ever seen an old man on the side of the road late at night?”

“Oh, yes,” she said. “Many times.”

“Is he a little touched upstairs? Doesn’t he ever go home?”

“No more touched than you and I are,” her neighbor said. “And he does go home right after you do. You see, he doesn’t like you driving by yourself late at night on these dark back roads. So he goes out to wait for you. When he sees your tail lights disappear around the bend, and knows that you are safe, then he goes home.”

Where is God? When is God present to you? God is love. God is here.

To love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves: “There is no other commandment greater than these,” Jesus says.

Love is not just a lovely accessory to our daily lives. Love is the rock foundation of our daily lives.

Love should be the basis for our decisions, the springboard for our actions, the grounding for our prayer life, the very purpose for which we are here.

God is love. God is here. And the door to God's love is always open to us.

I suspect that when people wonder where God is, it is sometimes because they have not consciously noticed when God is present to them.

The Gospel invites us to reach out, as the loving hand of God Himself, ...and gently show them. God is love. God is here.