

Finding God in a Chaotic World

A little over 13 years ago, our class in seminary took a “senior trip” in January, 2007 to Rome. One of the stops on our tour was the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, where you’ll find a large statue of Saint Paul. I took a picture of the statue, and on the back of my cards that I had made up for my ordination, I used this week’s second reading from Paul’s letter to the Romans. He writes that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. A reason that the reading struck me was because as I entered into my priesthood, my goal first and foremost was to work to help people realize how much God loves them.

Sometimes we can have a hard time realizing that truth. For some, they have a very sensitive conscience, or struggle with doubts, perhaps through a difficult upbringing or marriage or that they never received much love from others who were supposed to give it to them, or perhaps their view of God was molded by others to make them think God is some vengeful being who would remember every little thing they did. Others never really bother to look for God. Life gets in the way as they get busy or focus on work, school, hobbies and money. And for others maybe they suffer something serious in life, and take that as an indication that God abandoned them. Still others grow stagnant in their faith; they may live it out by fulfilling an obligation or even being people of prayer, but their love of God hasn’t grown from the fearful kind of love, e.g., doing something to avoid a consequence, to the spiritual kind of love that is deeper, doing things for the other because you will their good and happiness. So, where are you on the spectrum? What is it that might be separating you from the love of God?

If it’s a sensitive conscience, be at peace. Remember the first words of Jesus when He meets the apostles after the resurrection: peace be with you. Know that God loves you more than you can ever imagine. If there is something weighing on you, turn it over to God. Go to confession. Talk to God from your heart. Think about how much you are loved and receive Holy Communion. Or just gaze up on the crucifix, or at the stars, or perhaps at the tabernacle and remember that even if you were the only person in the world, God would still have died for you, all out of love. Sometimes it can also help to talk to a good spiritual guide too; a trusted friend, or a person you know who is solid in their Catholic faith that you can talk to about the deeper parts of your life that can help you maintain that connection to God.

If you’re busy, make time for God. As I quoted in last week’s homily, Saint Francis de Sales said praying a half hour was good, but if he was too busy than an hour was needed. We are busy people with so much going on. Note how busy Jesus is in the Gospel this week; Matthew starts with recording that Jesus withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. Jesus there would find time for prayer like we all need. The crowds though follow Him and what does He do? He makes time for them. Getting into the habit of prayer at a preferred time of day is a great way to find peace in your life. Consider praying with your family, or even praying in the car on your drive to work. Remember silence is a great form of prayer too; we don’t have to always be doing

something in prayer like talking or repeating words. Sometimes God speaks loudest in the silence.

Have you been hurt in life? Sometimes when we are wronged, we can bury that in some part of our soul and lock it away, because the past is too painful to think about. Sometimes there are things we did that were wrong. Other times people have hurt us through words, actions, or a person has been abused. Maybe you lost someone close to you due to illness or a sudden death, or have just had a hard life of health issues or family issues. Sometimes in these situations, a person can blame God, or think that God is getting them for something they did or did not do. This can be a human thing we do as we try to answer the age old question why do bad things happen to good people. We must remember though God does not abandon us. Again, we look to the Cross. On Good Friday, the worst possible thing happened: Jesus dies. And even Jesus does not fully understand why. But there is trust. The same trust Mary His mother had when she said "may it be done unto me according to your word." Jesus and Mary who's heart is pierced by the sword know what it is like to hurt, to suffer, to cry, and to die. We are never alone. While we might not understand the "why" this side of heaven, what we also need to understand is that God is not out to get us, but is there with us to carry our crosses.

Lastly, seek those people out to help you carry those crosses too. Life is hard. I love being a priest. But I'm also a pastor of a parish of 2000 families, and deal with quite a bit. Emmett my golden retriever is in a sense a huge help to me; he's never angry, never gossips about me to others, never puts me down. He's always just there to love unconditionally, like Kirby was. Thank God for dogs. But I also need others in my life who help me too. I have a trusted friend who is a priest who I'm able to process things with. I go to confession regularly. And I'll talk to another priest as well for spiritual counsel and advice. Sometimes life can be so stressful with the job, the marriage, the kids, not to mention all that's going on in the world. Hopefully you have a person or persons you can open up your heart to. Who doesn't mind if the answer to the question "how are you doing?" is "pretty lousy, do you have an hour?" With life's ups and downs, sometimes a person can do a lot to help us see the love of God.

In my life as a Christian and as a priest, I know full well some days God's love is easy to see, other days not so much. And I also know as a priest, I'm human. In my priesthood, I try my best. But I certainly have been short tempered or impatient at times, frustrated about a situation, or maybe not as attentive to someone as I should have been. All of us can at times do a better job in helping people be connected to the love of God. But I also strive to grow in my love of God daily, while at the same time improving my efforts to help people on their own faith journey.

As we say at Saint Joe's school, "God is good. All the time!" What an incredible loving God we have who doesn't run away from us or ignore us, but like the hungry crowd fed with the five loaves and two fish, uses what we have and fills it with His love, fulfilling our deeper hunger and needs. So let us open our eyes to the reality of that love, looking at what may have separated us from it in our lives and realize that, like the hungry

crowds in the Gospel, when we come to God He will meet us where we are at, and give us His love and peace. All we need do is ask.

God's blessings to you this week,

Fr. Paul