

March 11, 2018 – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

Tomorrow, Monday, is the last day I hear confessions during Lent during the day, from 10:00 to noon. After that, everything shifts to the night with penance services, beginning this week. So, last chance if you are a day-time person or can make it during the day.

This Jewish man didn't do a very good job of raising his son Jewish. As the son got older and became a young man he said, "you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to send him to Jerusalem and the Holy Land to learn about being a Jew." So, he sent him away. A year later his son comes back and says, "Dad, that was a great experience! I learned all about Judaism, but I came back Catholic." "Oi vey," the father says. So like the patriarch said, he went to his friend, told him his troubles. His friend says, "Oh my gosh, it's funny you should come to me, I too sent my son to Jerusalem and he came back Catholic, Oi vey." So they said, "Okay, let's go talk to the rabbi." They go to the rabbi and the rabbi says, "Oi, oi, guys, I too did the same thing and my son came back Catholic too! What are we going to do?" "Let's go to God with prayer." So they went to God with prayer. All of a sudden, the heavens opened up, this big voice boomed and said, "Amazing you should come to Me, I too sent my Son to Jerusalem."

Did you know that after all the Masses, people go out to dinner or to breakfast and their friends are saying, "First, before we order, what's Father's joke today?" And within about a half an hour after the 10:00 Mass all of San Tan Valley and Florence knows what I did today.

In our first reading, Chronicles, the man who wrote Chronicles was giving us salvation history of the relationship of the Jews to God. And, what came out as we see in our first reading, the Jews were fickle. They'd be with God when times were hard and they were punished, they'd go away when times were good. They couldn't stay with God. But, God kept forgiving them, God kept bringing them back. He would exile them for 70 years because they were unfaithful, then He would bring them back. All kinds of things happened to people in the Old Testament because they were unfaithful. A human person would say, "You know what? That's crazy, why do You keep loving a people that doesn't want to be with you all the time?" It's because God has mercy. Mercy does not depend on worthiness, none of us is worthy of God's mercy. That's the definition. To be merciful to someone means they don't deserve it, and you do it anyway. God doesn't love us because we are perfect. He perfects us through His love. But you know, that word "love", in the English language it's overused, and overrated, but it's overused. I can love Tillamook Vanilla Bean ice cream, and I do; and I can love my Mother, and I do. But if you didn't know the English language and you heard that or you were just learning you'd say, "He loves ice cream like his Mother?" Because it's so imprecise, it's only one word. The New Testament was written in Greek and Greek has four words for love. We have to look at all of them to determine what does it mean when John 3:16, God so loved the world He sent His only Son so the world might be saved and not condemned. We look at the types of love that exist in Greek. The first word we look at is "storgay." Storgay comes from a natural affection because of a natural connection. It can be superficial, "I love Tillamook Vanilla ice cream." That's storgay. Or it can be, "I love my cat, Fluffy." That's storgay. It's not very deep, most of the time. If it goes deep, then it can be confused with another word that we're going to talk about. This type of affection is not really used in the bible, hardly at all.

The second word that we know about for love, most of us are familiar with it, "Eros." Erotic – eros. When we talk about, falling in love. "John, John" "Martha, Martha." When we fall in love, "Oh their feet don't touch the ground and neither do mine, they are so perfect." That's eros. Don't ever do that. It's a passionate feeling and what's crazy, not only can it be between two people, but it can become an artist

and their work. Sculptors get so involved in making their work, they actually deeply in love with that piece of marble or that wood. It's their passionate feeling. Another one that we have, especially around now, we're seeing it all over the place, is a rabid sports fan, passionately in love with their team. That's eros. Same thing as falling in love with a person. It appears twice in the bible, in the Old Testament.

The third word, we have heard but we don't know if it's Greek or not. We don't associate it because it's connected with another word in Greek. Philadelphia, philia is a love, delphia is city; brotherly love. Philia is like two people sharing a common interest or bond. So, we say brothers and sisters share philia, because they share common parents. Even if they don't like each other and are away from each other sixty years or more, they have philia. Philia is an interesting one because it's the only word for love that can only happen among equals. We have to be on equal level to use the term philia. A father cannot love his son, philia. You cannot have a master and a slave with philia. You cannot have an owner and his pet with philia. It has to be among equals. And, what's interesting about this word is, it's used in the New Testament by Jesus. At the last supper is one of the times that He says, "I no longer call you servants, I call you friends." Philia. And because we don't get it in Greek, we don't know the difference between these words, we don't see what He is really saying. He's saying, "I now consider you equal to Me." Equal to me; He has raised us up to be equal to Him. Think about that, it's an amazing thing. You can think about that and be like, wow, I am equal to Jesus. Then of course because we are flawed human beings, "Well then why can't I change water into wine?" That kind of thing. So that's philia. That's used a couple times in the New Testament by Jesus.

The fourth word we may or may not have heard of, "Agape." It is used throughout the New Testament and the bible. This is the love that God has for all of us and for the people in our first reading in Chronicles. This is the reason that God is able to continually forgive. Sometimes it's translated as, "charity." That's not a good translation. A better translation would be, "Christ-like love." But, then you would have to know what Christ did, and that's gets very theological. So really, the best word for agape is, "Self-forgetfulness." Not selfishness, self-forgetfulness. A complete forgetting of self, in dealing with others. It focuses on doing good to others and serving them, helping them regardless of how I feel about them. Generous, sacrificial, self-giving. This is the love that Jesus had at the manger in Bethlehem; why he came down from heaven and became one of us. This is the love that Jesus had, *on the cross*, for each one of us. Saint John, in his letter writes, "God is love." I got so sick of that in the 70's because this priest I knew, that was his homily every Sunday; "God is love, we should love each other, God bless you." Can we hear something else? But, that's the kind of love we're talking about, agape. Self-forgetful love, completely focused on the good, happiness, and fulfillment of others, not our self. God created us, not for His happiness, but for ours, agape. That's why He forgives us as often as we need to be forgiven, agape. That's why he feeds us with the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus at the eucharist. We need, He doesn't, agape. That's why he carries our crosses with and for us. Because we need it, He doesn't, agape.

Being created in the image of God's likeness, means we are to imitate Him in agape. Self-forgetful love that forgives, that's compassionate, no matter whether I like the person or not. I have people tell me all the time, "Father, that's just so hard!" Yes, it is. But, we are called to be like God, not God Himself. So, God's love being personal, active, unconditional, unlimited, that's what we all have from Him and what He wants us to show. Today the Church, in that gospel, reminds us; God so loved the world that He did not consider Himself, didn't even think of Himself, that He sent His only son, that we might have eternal life and be saved from our sins.

Today is "Rejoice Sunday." Sunday is called, "Lataerae" in Latin. It means rejoice, the Sunday of joy. It's because of this message that the Church reminds us, for over three weeks we have had pounding ourselves with our hammers with sinfulness and penance and sacrifice. Now, let's take a break and remember because of sin and sinfulness, God sent His Only Son so that we could have eternal life, not eternal death. So rejoice today, is because of this gospel. John 3:16 has been called, "The gospel within a gospel." The other reason you know it's rejoice Sunday, rose colored vestments. Rose is the color of joy, rejoicing in the Church. Just as when the sun is coming up, creates a rosy glow on the horizon, as it brightens the day and chases the darkness away, so the love of God pierces the darkness of evil and sin and sends the evils of darkness fleeing away to nothingness. Today we celebrate with joy, that thought, that realization, that version of love, agape, self-forgetfulness. So, if you gave up chocolate for Lent, have some today. If you gave up ice cream for Lent, have some today. Know that you have to go back on the diet tomorrow, you have to give it up again tomorrow. But today, when you have it, rejoice, hold up your chocolate bar, hold up your spoon of ice cream and say, "Thank you God for the gift You gave me."

God bless you.