

Our Lady of Lourdes
Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time
January 31, 2010

Readings:

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

1st Corinthians 12:31-13:13

Luke 4:21-30

Fr. Bob

At the end of today's Gospel we hear how Jesus' hometown crowd were so outraged by his words that they wanted to throw him off a cliff.

Jesus' courage is at the heart of today's readings. Even though the crowd hated what they heard, Jesus preached boldly to his own people.

Jeremiah was similarly courageous in his teaching, in the face of enormous persecution from his people. And Paul knows the only reason one can endure hardships and rejection and even be seen as stupid in the eyes of the world is for the sake of love.

The word "love" has to be one of the most misused words in our language. We say we love our house, holiday, car, and even ice cream. But using love in this way we scarcely come close to what Christian love is all about.

St. Paul teaches today that love is not primarily about warm fuzzy feelings and violins. Paul knew that Christian love is an intensely practical business. There is no point in any of us saying we love anyone unless our actions follow the profession we make.

Indeed as St. John was to sharply say in his letter in the New Testament, "If you say you love God and hate your neighbor, you are a liar." We can say the right words about loving God and each other all we like, but if we do not show it in how we live, then we are noisy gongs and clanging cymbals.

There is no getting around it: Christian love always and everywhere involves sacrifice.

So, how can we love like this? Why should we love like this?

We can love sacrificially because other people have loved us in the same way. When anyone has been gentle, kind and patient with us, when they

did not insist on their own way, were not irritable, resentful or enjoy our downfall, we were on the receiving end of love. They showed us how to do it.

We can take this enormous gamble to love like this only when others have loved us enough to tell us the truth about ourselves and we in turn have spoken the truth to them. That's love.

And we can plunge into the unknown, because along with others we have held on to hope in the face of difficult times. That's sacrificial love and that is what Christian love is all about.

Jesus does not promise us in the Gospel that any of this is going to be easy, just necessary if we are going to live life to the full. And we also have legions of companions who have been down this road before us. From Jeremiah to Jesus to Paul to the martyrs and saints and to our own families, we know that it is possible to face down our fears, trust the track record of those who have done it before us, publicly show our courage, and leap into the future. And we have three things to guide us on the way. On one is written "faith." On the second is written "hope" and on the third and strongest is written "love."

Let's pray in this Eucharist, then, for the grace to be foolish in the eyes of the world and heroic in the courage it takes to love others sacrificially, and be loved by them.