

Homily - Lent 4 - B - March 11, 2018

We just heard these words: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish, but might have eternal life.” That one simple sentence bubbles over with so many different realities: God, love, world, gave, Son, everyone, belief, perish, eternal life.

Let’s focus on a few of them. Love. That word evokes different reactions in as many ways as there are different people. You remember Waylon Jennings’ song: “Looking for love in all the wrong places, looking for love in too many faces.”

Then, the great philosophical school known as Peanuts, the comic strip, has weighed in on the topic. One day, sitting at his typewriter, Snoopy writes: “Dear God, I just want to say I love you.” Then, on another day, as Peppermint Patty pours out her soul to Snoopy and speaks about her horrible week and asks Snoopy: “What do you do when everything goes wrong?” Snoopy’s response is a big kiss on her cheek to which she responds “That’s good advice.”

Look at the turmoil described in today’s first reading captured in the expression “a rebellious world.’ Could we identify as a rebellious people? In many ways, rebellion still occurs. Looking at the wars going on in the mid-east, look at the savage persecution of Christians, look at the drug wars rampant in our cities as well as the drug battles fought in our own neighborhoods, look at the many broken families in our own communities. Yes, we do live in a great country; yes, we enjoy relative peace and freedom from harm. Perhaps, though, we choose to ignore the rebellion rather than admit its existence.

Rebellion existed back then, and rebellion exists now. Amid all of that, we read “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” In response to that rebellion God sends his Son to reignite the fire of compassion within our hearts so that we can find the energy to believe again, to re-embrace life, to cast out the demons of darkness. And even more than all this, the good news is: It’s not about what we have to *do* to earn this. Instead it’s all about what God gratuitously *does for* us. He sends his Son.

The coming of Christ took place in time so many years ago. But, Jesus did not leave us orphans. Rather, he sent his Holy Spirit to dwell with us to this very day. Th at Holy Spirit comes to us through the Church.

After all, Christ did tell us that he would build his Church, his people on the rock of Peter. Our Church continues that presence of Christ in our world to this very day. Jesus, the fullness of his message, his sacraments, his love are the only effective remedies to the rebellious heart and ultimately a rebellious world.

The rejection of Jesus' message or the replacing of his message with humanly designed, but vastly weaker, alternatives have allowed rebellion to prosper. Rejection or disregard for the authentic message of Jesus will lead to failure.

One day in London, a well-known art expert was showing a visitor around an art gallery. This gallery contained masterpieces beyond all price, possessions of eternal beauty, and unquestioned genius. At the end of the tour, the visitor commented: "All of this art does nothing for me. I am not impressed." The art expert testily responded: "Sir, I would remind you that these works of art are no longer on trial. They have stood the test of time. The ones on trial are those who look at them, yourself included." The visitor basically had shared his blindness and was not able to open his eyes to the beauty and truth presented to him.

So, too, with the beauty and truth of Jesus' message and its continuity in today's church. Like those works of art, Jesus' message and his Church have withstood the test of time. We are called to embrace that message, to see its beauty, to thirst for its unique truth.

God loved us; God continues to love us. Made in God's image, we too must love God in return and love one another. However, love is not the puppy love of Snoopy nor the love strummed out in so many songs. Rather, love means sacrifice, giving up what we may want in favor of what God wants. I read this passage one day: "You can sacrifice and not love. But you cannot love without sacrifice." God's love for us led to the sacrificial love of Christ for us. So, too, true love means sacrifice.

As we live the Lenten season, we pray that love, as lived and taught by Jesus and continued in the Church today, can replace not only the rebellion existing in our world, but also any rebellion that may exist in our hearts.