

March 7 – Sermon at the Hispanic Eucharistic Service

Opening Prayer

May you be overwhelmed with the experience of God's love for you as we worship together today.

Sermon

My brothers and sisters, God loves you. You each exist because God loves each of you. And the purpose of your existence is to be with God forever, being loved by God and loving God.

In the Psalm we prayed together today, the Psalmist speaks this truth from our perspective. "O God, you are my God, my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you..." As St. Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, O Lord". Our deepest longing, whether we know it or not, is to be with God, to know God's love for us, and to return God's love. We will only be content when we live loving God and experiencing God loving us.

Today's reading from Exodus tells of God's love, in this case for the Hebrew people. They are suffering slavery in Egypt. So God calls Moses and tells him to free his people. Moses' first response is, "Who? Me? I can't do this." But God does works of love through people, people whom God calls to serve others. God promises to be with Moses to help him free the Hebrew people.

I have spoken to you of God's love for you. But now I am faced with the next two readings. They speak of sin and speak harsh words of punishment. How can I reconcile these readings with the love of God I have just talked about? How do we bring together the readings of God's wonderful love and the readings about sin and punishment?

What is sin? Sin is a rejection of God's love. You are made for God's love. If you push God away, you will end up empty inside. You will be chasing after satisfactions that will not satisfy you at all. Sin is a choice to act in destructive ways toward yourself. We are free to accept God's love or reject it. God honors our freedom. If we come to the end of our lives in this state of rejection, God honors our choice. I don't know much about eternity, but I do know that if we have chosen to spend it apart from God we will be unhappy.

Sin is also a choice to act in destructive ways toward God's beloved people, namely everybody. The effects of sin hurt other people here and now. We live in a world infested with sin. There are wars, companies that abuse their workers, companies that deceive their customers, men and women who are not faithful to their spouses, rulers who make laws for their own benefit rather than for the benefit of their people, parents who neglect their children, sons and daughters

who are insolent and ungrateful and disobedient to their parents, people who gossip about the faults of others, people say mean things to their classmates or co-workers, and so many other sins. All of these bring hurt and sorrow and fear into peoples' lives. And in hurting others we experience all kinds of negative things inside ourselves. It is not God who punishes sin. It is we who punish ourselves.

God is very, very hurt by human sin. God waits for and helps each of us come to our senses, express our sorrow, and receive God's love and forgiveness.

How important is this to God? We are celebrating Lent. We are remembering Jesus, the son of God. He is God who became one of us. We are remembering his journey to Jerusalem, where Jesus will somehow take the effects of our sins on Himself. He will lay down his life for us to show how overwhelming God's love is for each of us. How much does God love us? Look at the crucifix. How much does God want us to accept God's love and love God in return? Look at the crucifix. How much does God want us to love God's beloved, namely each other? Look at the crucifix.

How does God want divine love spread throughout the world? It is certainly true that the Holy Spirit dwells among us to bring this about. However, in addition we must notice the passage from Exodus. God asks Moses to bring God's love to the Hebrew people. In our second reading God is using St. Paul to bring God's love to the Corinthians. And in the Gospel reading St. Luke brings God's word of love to us. And of course, in the Gospel, we see the human Jesus fully bringing God's love to us.

God is not simply calling us from our sinfulness, sinfulness that God is aching to forgive. God is calling us to spread love to others, our families, our friends, our co-workers, and even to people we do not like and who have hurt us.

I am sitting in a wheelchair, and you may be wondering why. I have a terminal illness called ALS. I have a limited amount of time left. My heart longs that during this time I will gratefully receive God's love for me and that God will use me as an instrument to spread God's love to others.

All of you either have a lot of time or less time. God wants you to live knowing God's love for you. God wants you to live spreading God's love to others.

In a few minutes we will say a prayer confessing our sinfulness to God and asking God's forgiveness. These are not just words to recite. Reach down deep into your heart and feel God's loving forgiveness and thank God for His loving forgiveness and ask God to help you spread His love to others.

May God pour his abundant blessings on you. Amen.