

HOMILY 30TH SUN OT YRA 2017

How many of you know the legendary football coach Vince Lombardi? He was asked what it took to make a winning football team. This is what he said: “There are a lot of coaches with good ball clubs who know the fundamentals and have plenty of discipline but still don’t win the game. Then you come to the third ingredient: If you’re going to play together as a team, you’ve got to care for one another. You’ve got to love each other. Each player has to be thinking about the next guy and saying to himself: If I don’t block that man, Paul is going to get his legs broken. I have to do my job as well in order that he can do his. The difference between mediocrity and greatness is the feeling these guys have for each other.” According to Vince Lombardi, love makes all the difference. Obviously he is not talking about a warm fuzzy feeling; he is talking about team mates really caring for one another.

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus tells us that love makes all of the difference, love for God and love for one another. Jesus is not talking about a warm fuzzy feeling either. He is talking about really caring about God and one another. Jesus is asked which is the greatest commandment in the law. This was a common question at that time because there were 613 laws in the Jewish Torah and it was hard to focus upon all of them at once. Jesus picked two, love of God which is in Deuteronomy and love of neighbor, which is in Leviticus. The laws are not new, but paring them as the most important commandments in the law is new. We need to have both. In terms of loving God, we need to come to Mass and give him worship and praise on a regular basis, and we have to be involved in personal prayer. But it cannot be just about you and God. Your love of God must affect how you treat other people. Your prayer and worship informs how you are to love others.

It is all about the love. There is a huge study by Harvard University called the Alameda County Study. Data was collected between 1965 and 2004, so it was a really big study. Researchers found that the most isolated people were three times more likely to die during the follow up period than those with strong relational connections. They looked at other factors such as smoking, poor eating habits, obesity and alcohol abuse, and found that these were related to longevity as well, but people with strong social ties lived significantly longer than people with great health habits but were isolated. They also found that those who attended religious activities regularly also had greater longevity. So I guess loving God and loving one another is good for your health. I am not surprised, are you?

In our culture today, I think we are becoming more and more isolated. Many more people are living alone. Many people are separated by distance from their extended family. People change jobs frequently, so you are less likely to have long term work relationships. There is less personal interaction in our neighborhoods than there was years ago. Social media has replaced personal interaction in a big way and social media is much more superficial than personal face to face interaction. I think being part of a church community is becoming more and more important to our well being all of the time. When you reach out to others in our community that appear to be disconnected or isolated and bring them in to our community, you may be helping them way more than you ever thought. Love God and love one another. It is all about the love.