

HOMILY
6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER
MAY 9, 2021

Since today is Mother's Day, I want to tell you a little bit about my Mother. I learned more about the unconditional love of God from my Mother than I learned in six years studying theology in seminary. I always knew that my Mother loved me and would do anything for me. My parents did not have a lot, but they sacrificed for their four children; and we always had what we needed. When I was 15 years old, my Father died. My Mother was in her early 40s and never dated or remarried. She said that she was starting a new life that was going to be all about raising her four children. I had a three year old sister, a ten year old brother and an older sister who was away at college. My Mother went back to work, so it was up to me to step up and support her and help take care of my three year old sister. I learned how to do that from my Mother. I was able to love because my Mother loved me first. I knew what it meant to be part of a loving family. Now some people would look at my life as a teen and young adult and think that I sacrificed a lot. I never went through that rebellious phase. I could not give my Mother a hard time; she was already having a hard enough time. I supposed I missed out on some things because I spent so much time caring for my little sister. I never thought about it that way. I knew it was what I was supposed to do and I knew it was what I wanted to do. I had a very special relationship with my little sister then and I still do today. Fast forward to when I was finishing my 4th year in seminary. My Mother got very sick and was diagnosed with leukemia and was in and out of the hospital. Since I was getting out of seminary for the summer, I was able to take care of her. I met with my spiritual director and told him I was dropping out of seminary to take care of my mother. He said: "I think you should pray about this a little more." I said: "I do not need to pray about it a little more. I know this is what God wants me to do, and this is what I am going to do." God had other

plans. My Mother went home to the Lord in July, just in time for me to get myself together and start back to seminary in August, and here I am.

We heard Jesus tell us in the Gospel reading today: “Love one another as I have loved you.” How does Jesus love us? Jesus loves us with a self giving sacrificial love that expects nothing in return. Jesus does not question if we deserve his love, just like my Mother never asked if her children deserved her love. She never stopped to think if she had to give up too much to love her children. I see parents do this all of the time. And I hope we all have someone in our life like that, someone who loves us unconditionally without counting the cost. It may be a parent, a spouse, an aunt or uncle, a child, a best friend. That is what the Love of Jesus is all about. We can love the way Jesus loves because he loved us first. It is easy to love someone back who loves us unconditionally. But Jesus challenges us to love everyone the way he loves everyone. We are all God’s favorites.

Love is not like. Love is not a feeling. Love is a decision, a commitment, a mission. And Jesus calls us to love everyone. That means we are called to love our gay and transgender brothers and sisters. We are called to love our Asian and Black brothers and sisters. We are called to love Democrats and Republicans. We are called to love those who are brilliant and fit and those who are mentally and physically challenged. We are called to love those who are filthy rich and poorer than poor. We are called to love Muslims, Buddhists and atheists. We are called to love that person that steps on our last nerve every time we see them. We can love someone even if we do not agree with them. When someone has an opinion different from ours, we need to accept that they have the freedom to one another’s exercise of their free will as Jesus accepts the exercise of our free will.

While love expects nothing in return we gain a great deal by loving. A study was begun in 1938 at Harvard called the Harvard Study of Adult Development. The study that began during the Great Depression was done to discover what factors throughout a man’s life are the best

predictors of happiness in later life. The study included interviews with over 700 men in their late teens and twenties and they have been followed for more than 8 decades. So, what have they found to be the secret to happiness? Love. The quality of relationships with others was the greatest predictor of happiness later in life. Everything else was a distant second.

You want to make Jesus happy? Love. You want to make others happy? Love. You want to make yourself happy? Love.

Love & Peace

Fr. Jim