

HOMILY 20th SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME
August 17, 2025

What the world needs now, is love sweet love.
It's the only thing that there's just too little of.
What the world needs now, is love sweet love,
no not just for some, but for everyone.
Lord we don't need another mountain.
There are mountains and hillsides enough to climb.
There are oceans and rivers enough to cross,
enough to last till the end of time.
What the world needs now, is love sweet love,
no not just for some, but for everyone.

I think we need more love in the world, and we certainly do not need any more mountains and oceans to divide us. What we may sometimes need to pray about is what is the loving thing to do?

In the first reading, we hear from the prophet Jeremiah. He had a message from God and when people asked him he told them. Even when he knew he was telling the king something he did not want to hear, he told him the truth because it was an important message from God. Telling the truth was the loving thing to do, even though it was difficult. The message of the Gospel was a little disturbing today. Jesus tells us he came not to establish peace on earth, but rather division, father against son, mother against daughter, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law. We need to understand the context of Jesus' message. Jesus came to the Jewish people. Being Jewish was not just a religion; it was a way of life. It was a whole culture with rules and traditions and expectations. Being Jewish was the center of their world. Sometimes within families, some members believed Jesus was the Messiah and some did not. Eventually people that believed that Jesus was the Messiah were no longer welcome in the synagogue. In those days, men held all of the power so if you were a woman or a child you would have a hard time. There was no safety net like we have today. No Medicaid, bridge cards and Social Security. Their safety net was their family. So divisions in the family were a big deal. But following Jesus was important enough that if it caused divisions, so be it.

So how do we decide if the issue is important enough to allow divisions with the people that we love? In the second reading St. Paul tells us to keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus. What does that mean? I think it goes back to the new commandment that Jesus tells us sums up all of the law and the prophets. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love and serve the Lord by loving and serving one another. Love one another as I have loved you. It is all about the love and not the warm fuzzy feeling kind of love. It is treating all people with dignity and respect. It is all about the love.

So many divisions among family members and friends have been caused because of differences in political opinions. So many things have become politicized and we can see differences as a personal attack. Having different opinions over something we have no control over anyway does not seem like a good reason for divisions. I think we should keep a few things in mind before we have the conversations. If you have a strong emotional reaction to the topic this is probably not a good time to have the conversation so it is best to end it at least for the moment. Ask yourself why you are having the conversation. Is it to change the other person's opinion? You can usually determine very quickly if this is possible. If not, end the conversation. Is it to express your opinion to the other person? You can end the conversation after you have done that, particularly if you are not really being heard anyway. We also have to give up this desire to "win" in the conversation. I am not sure what exactly you are going to win except alienating the other person. You may have the conversation to establish some boundaries; maybe just agree to disagree and to stop talking about this topic. When you do have conversations try to focus on values rather than facts. Each extreme has their own set of facts and neither of them is totally accurate. The truth is somewhere in the middle. Maybe as we think through these issues ourselves we should be looking for the middle position. When we look at what is going on in the world today we need to try to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. What is the loving thing to do? Are we treating everyone with love and respect? Maybe we can agree on that as a primary value.