

HOMILY
5TH SUNDAY EASTER
MAY 18, 2025

I was listening to a podcast a couple of weeks ago and I heard a quote that has stuck with. This is what they said “There is no one you couldn’t love if you knew their whole story.” I think this is true. Because of my ministry, I listen to stories from many people. That is how I begin to establish a relationship with them. Even if I do not agree with them, I can usually understand why they believe what they believe and why they have done the things they have done. I may not agree, but I understand. Hearing their story enables me to avoid judging and condemning them. Then I can then look for the goodness. I need to let the Jesus in me find the Jesus in them. Loving is not about having a warm fuzzy feeling. Loving is treating people with dignity and respect in spite of our differences.

In the Gospel reading today we heard Jesus say “love one another. As I have loved you, so you should love one another.” Jesus was always listening to people’s stories. He was always reaching out to the poor and the marginalized. He was always reaching out to the people that the culture had thrown away. He was dining with them, listening to their stories and loving them. I think God can love us unconditionally just the way we are because he knows our whole story. Sometimes we think if we know how someone voted in the last election, we know everything about them. But we really know very little. I have good friends who have very different opinions than I have, but I know their stories. They have different opinions because they have had different experiences. And because I have heard their stories I know they are good people. So I can treat them with dignity and respect. It saddens me to hear that close friends and family members give up on these relationships. You know their stories. You should be able to continue to love them and treat them with dignity and respect. And sometimes we hear one negative thing about someone and we judge them and reject them. I do not think that any of us wants to be judged by the worst thing we have ever done. The Catholic Church teaches that we need to respect all human life from the moment of conception to the time of natural death and everything in

between. Every human being must be treated with dignity and respect, even those belonging to groups we have demonized or scapegoated.

And I think technology frequently interferes with hearing people's stories and establishing relationships with people. I am having an experience with the technology company that we have been using in the school. After 2 years, we all agree that things are not working and we want to end the contract early. I have been on Zoom meetings monthly with this company for two years and now I realize that I do not have a relationship with any of them. I have not heard any of their stories. They did not turn on their cameras, so I don't even know what they look like. They are just voices on a computer. In ministry everything is about establishing relationships so this is all new for me. It makes it difficult for me to negotiate with people that I have been "working with" for two years but I do not know who they are or where they are coming from. With technology even if you hear someone's story you really do not know if it is their story or if it is what they would like their story to be. When you are on line, you cannot tell the difference.

Something that is very scary to me is that you can create an AI friend. There are apps where you can pick the sex of your friend. You can pick how they look, their interests, how they interact with you, all kinds of things. You can create the perfect friend that is not a friend at all. Is this where we are headed? How scary is that?

When Jesus tells us to "love one another as I have loved you," I think we need to love as Jesus did. We need to get out and be with people and hear their stories. That is how we are going to be able to break down barriers and divisions. That is how we are going to be able to treat people with dignity and respect. This requires personal contact. Technology has value. It has its place, but you cannot establish relationships through technology. We need to hear each other's stories. "There is no one you couldn't love if you knew their whole story."