

Unconditional Love
St. Mary's Church (all Masses)

September 23, 2018
25th Sunday

The homily at a Catholic Mass is SUPPOSED to be a reflection on themes presented by the Scripture readings. That will NOT be the case today. Unfortunately, as Pastor of this Faith Community, I need to address with you some very serious and pressing issues and concerns.

All week long, my Parish Staff and I have listened to MANY deeply disturbing accounts of the EXPERIENCE of people who attended the 8 a.m. Mass last Sunday.

I have spoken personally with several people this week who, with TEARS in their eyes, told me of the hurt and the pain they experienced as a result of the homily they heard that morning, which, in the words of one person, attempted to blame the entire clergy sexual abuse crisis on homosexuality.

Another person told me that the homily caused her to question her faith. Another told me that the church is no longer a "safe place" for her.

Some people were HURT and ANGRY because they FELT that either THEY, or someone they know and love, had been JUDGED and CONDEMNED during the homily because they were GAY.

Incidentally, regarding the issues of pedophilia and homosexuality, studies in recent years have concluded that there is NO connection between the two.

While both homosexuals AND heterosexuals CAN be irresponsible with their sexuality, fathers and uncles are STATISTICALLY the most frequent sexual abusers of children.

I don't say this to, in ANY way, diminish the HORRIBLE impact of CLERGY sexual abuse. But only to say that this problem is RAMPANT in our culture.

When these acts ARE committed by CLERGY, or covered up by bishops, this is particularly reprehensible because WE hold a position of trust, and of moral and spiritual authority. Like anyone else, CLERGY need to be held accountable for these crimes.

Back to my experiences of this past week. Someone who identified himself as a GAY, CATHOLIC man, left at the front door of the rectory, a large bouquet of flowers with a huge BLACK ribbon around it. The emotional note attached to the flowers lashed out at the Church, and basically judged and condemned ALL Catholic Priests.

To his credit, the man also signed his name, and we have since exchanged some very helpful e-mails. I have also invited him to meet with me, if he would like.

Another parishioner told a staff member here at St. Mary's that she doesn't want her CHILDREN exposed to the kind of BIGOTRY and HATRED she heard from the pulpit last week.

Some parishioners were so DISTURBED by the homily that they have, at least for the time being, removed themselves from the liturgical ministries they were performing here at church.

I can't tell you how deeply SORRY, how SADDENED, and how literally SICKENED I have been, by the HURT, and the PAIN which so many Catholics have experienced, first of all, due to the horrific sexual abuse crisis in the Church over many decades, and more recently, due to the painful experience of many people, here in this Church, at last Sunday's 8 a.m. Mass.

The Church should NOT be a place where people have OLD wounds re-opened, or NEW wounds sustained. The Church should NOT be a place where anyone leaves feeling JUDGED or CONDEMNED.

Jesus Himself said, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned."

I talked with Father about the disturbing and harmful impact his homily had on many people. Upon hearing some of what I just shared with you, he described the situation as "awful" and he REGRETS the negative impact his words created.

Having just arrived here this past summer, I don't know Father very well. My impressions are that he is a good man who made some very unfortunate decisions regarding the approach to his homily last week.

If you are one of the people who were hurt by Father's homily last week, I hope you will find it in your heart to forgive him.

At our core, we ALL know that Jesus calls us to be a loving, forgiving, healing Faith Community where God's UNIMAGINABLE and INCOMPREHENSIBLE Compassion, Mercy and Love are ALIVE and flourishing among us.

In St. John's Gospel, Jesus summarized the entire Law and the Prophets, and He summarized HIS Way of Life with ONE simple directive, "This is my commandment," He said. "Love one another." He offered NO EXCEPTIONS to this rule.

He did CLARIFY the rule by adding to it that we are to LOVE, even our ENEMIES. He ALSO said that are to love our NEIGHBOR, which included the most reviled, most hated people of HIS day, the Samaritans!

Back in 2014, when Bishop da Cunha was installed as Bishop of this Diocese, the Opening Hymn at his installation Mass was "All Are Welcome." The Opening Hymn of THIS Mass was also "All Are Welcome."

As Pastor of St. Mary's Parish, I want to reiterate that All ARE Welcome here in THIS Faith Community.

In fact, ALL human life, that means each and EVERY human being is CHERISHED and LOVED by GOD. Therefore, ALL human life, each and every human being, must be cherished and loved by US, HIS Faith Community.

Whether that human life is very young, (including not yet born), OR very old, OR any age in between, he or she ought to be cherished and loved by us, and TREATED with Compassion, with Mercy, and with Love, because ALL human life is precious in God's eyes.

Whether someone is a Conservative Republican or a Liberal Democrat, whether they are Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, or any OTHER religion, or even NO religion at all, whether they are Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, or any other ETHNIC group, they ought to be cherished and loved by us, and TREATED with Compassion, with Mercy, and with Love, because they are ALL precious in God's eyes.

Whether someone is GUILTY of wrongdoing, OR completely innocent, whether they are extravagantly wealthy, or homeless and poor, whether they were born in this country, or born somewhere else, they ought to be cherished and loved by us, and treated with Compassion, with Mercy, and with Love, because they are ALL precious in God's eyes.

Whether a person is a man or a woman, whether they are married, separated, divorced or single, whether they are straight, gay, bisexual, or transgender, they ought to be cherished and loved by us, and treated with Compassion, with Mercy, and with Love, because they are ALL precious in God's eyes.

Whether someone is Red Sox fan or a Yankee fan, a Patriots fan or a New York Jets fan, a Bruins fan or a Montreal Canadians fan, they ought to be cherished and loved by us, and treated with Compassion, with Mercy and with Love, by US, because they are ALL precious in God's eyes.

Once again, to quote the Opening Hymn, "ALL are welcome in THIS place."

Do you ever find yourself in conversations with people where HATRED is alive and well? I've lived in RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES where I've WITNESSED hatred alive and well between community members!

Or sometimes you hear people talk about HATING certain groups of people, like FOREIGNERS! But usually it's only CERTAIN foreigners, like Muslims or Mexicans, for example. You never hear anyone say they hate people from Canada, even though THEY'RE foreigners, too.

I've heard people say they HATE those "bleeding heart liberals", or others say they HATE those "heartless conservatives!"

I heard people talk about HATING Barak Obama while HE was President, and now I hear people say they HATE Donald Trump. (Not the same PEOPLE hating both of them, but it's the same HATRED). Hate, Hate, Hate! Sometimes, HATRED seems to be everywhere.

As one bumper sticker says, "Hatred is NOT a family value." Nor is it a Christian value!

And as the sign says outside my former monastery, Glastonbury Abbey, in Hingham, Massachusetts, "Hatred Has No Home Here." Hatred has no home HERE, at St. Mary's, either.

To be a follower of Christ is to know that each and EVERY human being is cherished and loved by God. Therefore, each and EVERY human being, OUGHT to be cherished and loved by US, - HIS Faith Community.

We used to say, "Hate the sin, but LOVE the sinner. THAT'S the GOSPEL message. Hate the SIN, but LOVE the sinner. LOVE the PERSON! Unfortunately, too many people TODAY seem to be just looking for reasons to HATE others.

The problem with hatred is that it never touches peoples' hearts, or helps them to change, and grow. Hatred only incites more hatred. "If you hate me, I'll hate you." That's the way it works!

The powerful experience of Compassion, Mercy and Love for others can truly touch peoples hearts, and change their lives.

As Pope Francis said in an address earlier this year, "Each PERSON is PRECIOUS. PERSONS are more important than THINGS. And the worth of an INSTITUTION is measured by the way it treats the life and dignity of HUMAN BEINGS, particularly when they are vulnerable..."

May OUR experience of GOD'S UNIMAGINABLE and, INCOMPREHENSIBLE, Compassion, Mercy and Love for US, INSPIRE us to extend that SAME Compassion, Mercy and Love to ALL human beings, NO exceptions!