

4th Sunday Ordinary Time Year "C"

Readings: Jer. 1:4-5, 17-19; 1 Cor. 12:31- 13:13; Luke 4: 21-30

February 2-3, 2019

"There are in the end three things that last: faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love." This passage, this sentence from our second reading caused me to think about things that last in a world of change. Change, change, everything changes. I do not know if I can handle all the change. Change is at such a rapid pace, it is easy to feel left behind.

I am old enough to remember when Seattle moved its baseball team (Pilots) to Milwaukee, when Buffalo NY had an NBA basketball team, when gasoline was \$0.24 per gallon (leaded gasoline of course), and Hershey Chocolate Bars were just a dime.

I even remember prior to a program on TV (which consisted then of five stations), the NBC peacock informed us that the upcoming program was "in living color." And yes, I am older than the Super Bowl! I remember practicing the English responses for the New Order of Mass in 1969.

The list goes on, and we could all make our lists. Does anything last? Fully five centuries before Jesus, Heraclitus could say in "Life is Flux" (*Panta Rhei* in Greek, meaning that the only constant in life is change. Some people love change and embrace it. Others shy away from it because it is frightening. What is known makes us more comfortable.

Have you ever gone back to a place in which you have not visited in many, many years? You have memories in your mind, lasting images etched in the deep recesses of your heart. Suddenly, they all come back, as in an instant. Yet, instinctively we notice what has changed. When St. Paul noted that in the end only three things last, perhaps he was onto something quite profound. He could not have known of our modern mobility which keeps people moving on average 11 times in their lifetime, even with all his missionary journeys.

However, Paul most certainly knew the transitory nature of life and faith. He who once persecuted Christians, underwent radical change, becoming one of the greatest of saints. Paul knew through grace that the things of this world were passing away, yet what is most essential remains. What meets the human eye cannot be all there is—there must be more.

The theological virtues of **faith, hope, and love** enable us to participate in the divine nature of God and are the very foundation of Christian moral activity; they give it its special character.

Faith is the virtue by which we believe in God and what he has revealed to us, as well as what the Church has proposed for our belief. It is as mentioned in the Letter to the Hebrews: “Faith is confident assurance concerning what we hope for, and conviction about things we do not see.” (Hebrews 11:1) We also know through experience that faith without works is dead—our faith must be manifest through what we say and do.

Hope is the virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven as our ultimate happiness, placing our trust in God’s promises and not relying solely on our own strength. God wants us to be happy; he wants above all a life of joy and peace for us. Yet, in giving us free will, he gave us the greatest gift of all—that of freedom, a gift that can be abused. The virtue of hope keeps us from giving into discouragement. Hope is a buoy in the midst of the turbulent waters of life.

Charity or Love is the greatest of all because it alone remains in heaven. It is the virtue by which we love God above all else, and others on account of Him. Jesus loved us to the end, and invited us to allow our love to abide, to remain in him. Charity as a virtue binds all else together. It allows us to see more clearly the big picture. It alone remains in heaven.

Faith is not needed because what was unseen will one day be out in the open for all to see. **Hope** is no longer operative because the Father for whom we hope has now embraced us.

Love is also the virtue that may well take the most work on our part. Love does not just happen. It is borne in the trials and tribulations of our daily lives. Love of God is not earned; it is pure gift, yet one for which we must be disposed. In this respect, we have plenty to say about the matter.

We can close off our hearts to the love of God, a family member, a classmate at school, a spouse or we can build an edifice characterized by a purpose and plan. This edifice, our soul, will be changed. We will see things much differently, and as a result, we will change. This may very well make us uncomfortable and others too. Change means the unknown.

Imagine how Saul must have felt. He was a persecutor of Christians; he attacked them, and now, he was to become one of them. How afraid do you think he must have been? His enemies were now his friends. His friends were now his enemies. Paul did not know whether he would ever be accepted. He risked all for Christ because he could do nothing other.

Let us pray for the grace needed to allow the three greatest virtues to find a willing place in our hearts and souls. Let us not be afraid of the changes that will take place in our lives when we invite God to be the driving force behind our actions and decisions.

And in so doing, may we experience all the joy and happiness God would desire for us, while at the same time being mindful of those who are most in need in our families, in our communities, and in the world.