

The Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Homily – June 13, 2010

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A man was driving home from work one day when he saw a group of young children selling lemonade on a corner near his home. The kids had posted the typical magic marker sign over their lemonade stand:

LEMONADE — 10 CENTS

The man was impressed with the enterprising young children, so he pulled over to the curb to buy a cup of lemonade.

A young boy approached his car and the man placed his order for one cup of lemonade and he gave the boy a quarter. After much deliberation, the children determined that the man had some change coming; and after looking in their cigar box cash register, they finally came up with the correct amount.

The boy returned the change with the man's cup of lemonade. Then the boy just stood there by the man's car and stared as the man enjoyed his fresh lemonade. Finally, the boy asked the man if he was finished. "Just about," the man said. "But why?" The little boy said, "That's the only cup we have and we need it back to stay in business."

It is difficult to operate a lemonade business if you only have one cup.

This is something of a parable for what Jesus saw in the religious leaders of his day. When it came to love, they had only one cup.

They taught people to love, but it was a very restricted, limited, narrow, conditional love that they lived out themselves and called for from their followers:

Love those who look like you and act like you and dress like you and talk like you and eat like you and think like you—and shun everybody else! Love only those we have admitted into our inner circle and see everybody else as the enemy, the adversary, the outcast.

When it came to love, that was the only cup they had.

But along came Jesus with a different idea and a different approach. He loved everybody. He accepted everybody. He included everybody. He reached out graciously and intentionally—to those who were down on their luck, to those who were hurting, to those who were poor and needy, to those who were in trouble, to those who were labeled as outcasts. Tenderly, he drew them into the circle of love. When it came to love, he had lots of cups to share.

This was so important to Jesus; but the truth is, at first his disciples did not get it. They were not tuned in. What Jesus was calling on them to do was a dramatic departure from the “we have only one cup” approach to love that they had been taught all of their lives...to love only those who are just like them and not to love those who were outsiders or outcasts.

Consider the woman who came before Jesus. She had a reputation around town. She noticed that good manners had not been expressed to Jesus by Simon his host. So she rises to the occasion. She washes Jesus’ feet with her tears; she dries his feet with her hair; she anoints his feet with her perfume.

Simon is highly offended. He is shocked that Jesus would let this woman of the streets even touch him. But Jesus sees it as a beautiful, tender, thoughtful, loving gesture. And he not only commends her but includes her and forgives her.

Unconditional love. Love with no stipulations. Love with no strings attached. Jesus called it the most authentic sign of discipleship.

Look it up in John 13:34-35. He says, *“A new commandment I give you: that you love one another as I have loved you. By this kind of unconditional love, all will know you are my disciples.”*

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells us that the best way to show our love for him is to reach out in love to others, especially to those who are hurting. Recently, I heard a powerful story which relates to this that came out of the Second World War.

A little boy was arrested, along with his family, by the Nazis and placed in a prison camp. After several weeks in this horrible concentration camp, they were led out one day to the edge of the city and placed in front of a big ravine which had been dug out with bull-

dozers to be the grave for hundreds of these prisoners. Machine-gun fire rang out and the prisoners fell dead into the ravine.

Miraculously, the bullets missed the little boy; but he fell back into the grave with his family, splattered with blood. The bulldozers then pushed dirt on top of them; but again, miraculously, he was close enough to the surface that he was able to breathe and he was smart enough and courageous enough to lie still and wait until evening. When night fell, he was able to make his way out of the grave. He went to the first house and knocked on the door. When the people opened the door, they saw him there and they recognized that he was a prisoner and they were afraid. They slammed the door in his face. Then he went to the second house and the third house, and the same thing happened. They all slammed their doors in his face.

But when he came to the fourth house, the woman was about to close the door when the little boy remembered the verse about the least of these and he shouted, “Wait! Don’t you recognize me? Don’t you know who I am? I am one of the least of these. I am of Jesus whom you say you love!” And the woman opened the door and welcomed him in. She adopted him and raised him as her own.

Wouldn’t it be something if we could see the face of Jesus in every person we meet? Wouldn’t it be something if we could relate to every person we meet as if that person were Jesus in disguise?

Unconditional love...that is the torch Christ passes to us; it’s the sign of discipleship; it’s the calling of all who follow him. He made that dramatically clear on a cross. The main thing is to love God unreservedly, to love people unconditionally.

