

LATE HAVE I LOVED YOU

“Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! Lo, you were within, but I was outside, and it was there I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me but I was not with you. (It was these) created things that kept me from you and yet, if they had not existed in you, they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me and I burned for your peace.” Confessions, Augustine of Hippo, c. 400AD

That passage was written in a personal journal over 1600 years ago. And yet, how many of us hear it and think, “Yes, that was me too?” It was written by Saint Augustine of Hippo one of the great bishop saints in the early church but who had lived a pretty selfish life well into his thirties until he had a conversion of heart. He was “looking for love in all the wrong places” as the country song goes. But we do look for love. There is something about us—and love. We go together. Perfect together. We do a lot of living but underneath and deep within we are each looking for love. We want to find what our heart seeks.

Jesus gets into it today with some Pharisees who lived their whole lives trying to be as pure and perfect as possible. Their concentration was on the observable, the tangible, the externals of life. Jesus has concerns about purity too. He wants us all to experience a genuine purity but it is not dependent on the externals of life. There is something deeper. Something on the inside. And what comes out of the human heart is what makes us impure—or pure.

Jesus lists these things: evil thoughts, theft, murder, greed, malice, deceit, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, foolishness, lasciviousness, adultery, unchaste actions. These come from within the human heart. And they render a person impure. These are the things that contaminate and infect and tear down and destroy. But other things come from within the human heart too: joyful thoughts, generosity of spirit, healing actions, receptivity, kindness, honesty, love, reverence, humility, wisdom, virtue, faithfulness, purity. All these things emanate from the human heart too, by the grace of God, and they render a person blessed, perfect, pure of heart.

My friends, why does God’s Word become flesh? Why didn’t God just wave his hand and destroy all evil and remake everything on earth? Why does he instead send his beloved to become

one of us and one with us? This is an important question. God's beloved becomes human and by the gift of his dear mother, Mary, he is given a human heart, a human voice, a human countenance. By Mary's gift he is now able to experience all that we experience, even death. And in the process he will show us how to live. In the process he will restore our lost innocence, and forgive our past sins. Because of the gift of Jesus's Spirit from the Father's hand we do not find ourselves any longer condemned to the inner impurities of past sinful actions. There is more to us now. There is hope. Authentic life.

Jesus' presence is all about the human heart—and its re-creation. Something we need but are unable to do for ourselves or for others. Jesus, the Son of God, can do this. Jesus has done this. Jesus promises he will continue to do this. It is up to us to open ourselves to his grace and receive his gifts and allow him to purify our hearts. We are not condemned to the failures, selfishness and impurities of our past. We can live and love and make the gift of ourselves to another, to many others, to God himself.

At the 10:30 Mass on Sunday a father and daughter will make their profession of faith as Catholics, receive the seal of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation and then receive Holy Communion as members of the Catholic family here at Saint Anthony's. Their presence here today is about the heart. Opening themselves to God's grace and responding with their affirmation to the power of Jesus Christ, his Spirit and his presence in the Eucharist. Let them teach us. Let them remind us of something we believe but may have taken for granted at times. And let us renew our own decisions to make the gift of our own hearts to God as his Son has done for us.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.