

Homecoming Reflection
October 14, 2017

Good morning. I hope you will allow me a little rephrasing of today's Gospel as I begin our reflection this morning.

“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love her, and we will come to her and make our dwelling with her.” It is no surprise that love figures at the center of today's Gospel for in truth love is the central message of Jesus Christ. This year at Mount Saint Mary's, we are talking a lot about love. We opened our year with our annual Mass of the Holy Spirit, and like today, our readings called us to ponder love as we reflected on the Spirit at work in our lives and in the world. Let me share with you a question I posed to our full community as we celebrated the year in front of us:

“What if the mightiest word is love?” Distinguished poet Elizabeth Alexander posed this question in a poem written entitled, Praise Song for the Day. What if love is the mightiest word, the strongest thing? What if love is stronger than hatred, than our tendency to judge, to separate, to exclude?

Imagine a world without violence; a world without fear of those who are different from us. A world where all feel welcome, valued, respected and hope-filled, a world of peace, a world of love! Perhaps the more cynical among us would call such imaginings, simply dreams: unattainable, unrealistic and a waste of precious resources.

But what if love is the mightiest word? Not a romantic notion of love, not a benign love of the neighbor through occasional acts of charity but a fierce, relentless, stubborn, unshakeable and unbreakable love. A love that says NO, to exclusion and hatred in all their forms. A love that stands up, speaks up and refuses to succumb to despair. A love that allows us to talk through our differences, to move from polarized to unified. A love that lifts up dreams and fights for them with every ounce of strength.

Many would say that the vision of a love big enough to transform the world is just a dream. But my friends, we come from a long line of dreamers who act out of this kind of love. We come from women who built schools and hospitals and homes where all are welcome. We come from women who have been saying “yes” to the power of love since 1650 when they began their first ministry of lacemaking in that little town of Le Puy, France. These women believed then – and they believe today - in the transformative power of love. Love through the education of the mind and spirit, through the healing touch of medicine and compassionate care, through the nourishment of food and the security of shelter, through the power of respect and

the recognition of human dignity. Our founders, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, have always been dreamers of bold dreams. They know the power of profound and unifying love – and they call us to believe and live this truth.

Now this is not easy work, and these are not easy times. It is understandable that we become discouraged, overwhelmed, afraid. But in today's Gospel, we are reminded of a powerful gift Jesus offers to each us to sustain us in this mission of love. He says to his beloved followers and to us, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." These words reassure. They help center us. They clear the noise that fear and despair create in our lives, particularly in the face of so much need, pain and injustice in our world. When I read these words, I feel a moment of respite. But here's where it gets interesting because Jesus doesn't stop there; in the line that immediately follows the Gospel reading we heard today, Jesus adds four powerful words that change everything. He says, "Get up. Let's go."

The peace that Jesus evokes is not a notion of personal tranquility that is separate from the world, he is talking about a powerful kind of peace that is steeped in the world. Isaiah made that very clear in our reading. "The works of justice will be peace," Isaiah tells us. "The effect of justice, calm and security." Justice and peace and calm and security are intrinsically connected. We cannot have one without the others. We can not live in a personal sense of peace that separates us from our sisters and brothers.

To be at peace in our hearts requires that we get up and go out and work for justice. Love calls us to live differently. It means really "caring for the dear neighbor." It means truly serving all persons without distinction. It is a fierce and powerful notion for love that works for justice means that we as a people of faith cannot stand down until every neighbor, everywhere, is clothed in dignity, security and love. We are called to love as Jesus loves us.

Poet Elizabeth Alexander has said, the word, love, "calls up deep, deep responsibilities."

St. Theresa of Avila understood the responsibilities of such a love when she left us with this prayer that I share with you today:

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

So let us do as Jesus calls us. Let us get up, go out and live as if love is the mightiest word, the strongest force, because, as people of faith, we know it is.