

Homily – Nov. 14, 2020

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We gather once again to allow God to strengthen our faith, so that we can truly build up God's kingdom and "kin"-dom of love. We stand before our compassionate God as human beings acknowledging our often-faltering faith.

What first struck me as I read St. John's letter, our first reading this morning, was his closing statement indicating that strangers become co-workers. That reminded me that our whole mission effort in the Church, in St. John's time and now, has that kind of goal. Upon rereading his letter, I saw that in fact St. John starts by with something even more basic and essential which we may miss: "You are faithful in all you do for the brothers and sisters, especially for strangers." St. John equates strangers are our brothers and sisters.

We may ask why John emphasizes strangers. First, we need to recall that St. John's letters are his signature statements about love. In his first letter he makes the absolutely, most fundamental faith statement for humankind, "God is love." Jesus says that love is most obvious when we lay down our life for a sister or brother. Such pouring out of one's love becomes even more obvious yet, when that person is a stranger—AND even more so yet, when that stranger is an enemy.

That's why Pope Francis' first-ever trip out of the Vatican the month after he became pope was so astounding. He flew to the little island of Lampedusa, just off the shores of Italy. For what? He visited that island to greet and meet the Muslim refugees from Libya and wish them well on the opening day of the special Islamic month of Ramadan. Pope Francis was well aware that many Christians, including Catholics, all too easily generalized Muslims as their enemies, as terrorists. That day Pope Francis made St. John's statement blazingly true, "You are faithful in all you do for the brothers and sisters, especially for strangers."

In the Gospel we saw the exact opposite dynamic presented in Jesus' parable. A judge did not want to help his widow "sister." But she kept pleading until he finally and still begrudgingly gave her the just decision. Of course, Jesus was trying to make the point that if one pleads—prays—perseveringly, love in the form of justice will come about. God wins out.

However, we must pay attention to Jesus' final question. "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" In other words, will the Son of Man find people—us--believing that love is God and therefore more readily want to help a widow, even when—or especially—when she is of a group we consider strangers?

May St. John be able to say to all of us, “You are faithful in all you do for the brothers and sisters, especially for strangers.”