He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother
Twenty-Third Sunday In Ordinary Time 2017

Reflection By: Deacon Paul V. Hursh

“Oh, that today you would hear his voice: Harden not your hearts…” (Psalm 95:8) Love is the consistent theme throughout all the readings and the Psalm for this week. It is treated on several levels and it is important to see love in all its dimensions and then to carry it out in our own lives and in the life of our community. This is a huge challenge in the present time, where the first response to any offense seems to be hatred and vengeance. Are we putting God to the test when we lack the patience towards others that God extends to us? Oh, that we would follow the plea we make when praying the Our Father and forgive others their offenses towards us as we wish our offense to be forgiven by God.

How open are we to God's grace that will allow us to treat others with patience in our daily affairs? Perhaps if I can practice this kind of patience in the simple day to day, then when it comes to the bigger and more challenging issues I will find the strength to love, even my enemies as Jesus commands us.

Love comes in a full range of degrees as St. Paul outlines in his letter to the Romans.

Paul epitomizes the Christian life within the law of love. In Paul's Jewish tradition love is the fulfillment of the Law and the Law is carried out on several levels. One way of looking at love in a deeper way is through four Greek words for love. In ancient Greek there are four distinct words for love: agápe, éros, philía, and storgē.

• éros means love, mostly of the sexual passion. The Modern Greek word "erotas" means "intimate love. Although eros is initially felt for a person, with contemplation it becomes an appreciation of the beauty within that person, or even becomes appreciation of beauty itself.
• Philia means "affectionate regard, friendship," usually "between equals." Philia is expressed variously as loyalty to friends (specifically, "brotherly love"), thus Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love.

• Storgē means "love, affection" and "especially of parents and children." It is the common or natural empathy, like that felt by parents for offspring. This is also used when referencing the love for ones country or a favorite sports team.

• Agápe means "love: esp. charity; the love of God for man and of man for God." Agape is used by Christians to express the unconditional love of God for his children. This type of love was further explained by Thomas Aquinas as "to will the good of another."

In each of these successive words we can see the deepening of what is meant by love from attraction and appreciation, to sharing common values and concerns, to love of family, to the highest form – unconditional love. In our reading from Ezekiel we see that we have a responsibility for others to the point of concern for their salvation, and in this we risk admonishing them when we see others stray from the way of God. It is not about being judgmental, but in our understanding that we are in this together and have responsibility (love) for one another. Our salvation is tied to theirs. This is also reflected in Jesus’ instruction in today’s Gospel. This teaching includes showing respect for the other by making our correction in a private way, at least at first.

St. Paul carries the theme of Love to its ultimate conclusion that we should love others as we love ourselves. Jesus also points this out when he also quotes Leviticus, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, ‘love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you…” (Matthew 5:43-44)

All these commands regarding love are more than a little challenging. It is only by the grace of God that we can even begin to fulfill them, but try we must. There was a popular song in 1969 that spoke of the challenge in this winding road of life and the challenge of love. It begins where we began today in Ezekiel and it leads us to the recognition that the other is not our enemy or a stranger, he is our brother. God’s grace will give us the strength that we need for this journey. We should not concern ourselves with the weight of the load, because Jesus promises, “My yoke is easy, and my burden light.” (Matthew 11:30)

There is a link below if you would like to listen to it as it was performed. The song is called…

He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother
The Hollies
Composed by Bobby Scott and Bob Russell

The road is long
With many a winding turn
That leads us to who knows where
Who knows where
But I'm strong
Strong enough to carry him
He ain't heavy, he's my brother
So on we go
His welfare is of my concern
No burden is he to bear
   We'll get there
   For I know
   He would not encumber me
He ain't heavy, he's my brother
   If I'm laden at all
   I'm laden with sadness
   That everyone's heart
Isn't filled with the gladness
   Of love for one another
   It's a long, long road
From which there is no return
While we're on the way to there
   Why not share
   And the load
Doesn't weigh me down at all
He ain't heavy he's my brother
   He's my brother
He ain't heavy, he's my brother, he ain't heavy

https://youtu.be/oT57tjz9py8