WHERE IS GOD?
Twenty-Eighth Sunday In Ordinary Time 2016

Reflection By: Deacon Paul Hursh

When we find ourselves, as we do today, in the midst of suffering from wars, natural disaster, violence in our streets, and threats from abroad; we may ask, Where is God?" Do we have a God who is distant and unconcerned with the hatred spread by so many people. Is Heaven so far away that God doesn’t know how many people suffer from personal prejudices and institutionalized discrimination? Where is God?

I remember from my years in St. Joseph’s parochial school in Downers Grove, Illinois, what we learned from the Sisters of St. Joseph - that God is Omnipresent – God is everywhere. This means that God is omnipresent in two ways; by nature and grace. Everything is created by God and because of this, God’s essence is present in all things – everything created by God shares in God’s goodness. Surprisingly this includes all people (both our friends and enemies), angels, and demons. Nothing exists outside of God and without God willing it into existence – at each moment. God is also present by God’s grace. By God’s grace, God is present in the souls in whom he dwells as in a temple. So why all the hatred and strife between the parts of God’s creation?

In God’s infinite wisdom we are given a free will. I believe that we are created in this freedom so that we can choose to love – to love the Creator and to love creation – or not. Otherwise, if it is not a free choice then there is no love. God gave us this freedom to choose the right. God did not give us this freedom to choose hatred, indifference, violence, but without the option to choose wrongly there is no true option for love. Unlike us, God always chooses
love, mercy, forgiveness, and healing. This brings us to our scriptures for today. It does not matter to God what the nationality, religion, race, etc. the person is – God still loves them regardless of who they are, where they are, or their present state (physical or spiritual). In our first reading (2 Kings 5:14-17) Naaman was healed even though he was not a Jew – God did not love him less because we was not a believer. He loved him because He had created Naaman for love. It is heartwarming to see Naaman's response to his healing. Naaman requests some of Israel's soil to cart back to his own country so that he can worship this miraculous God on Israel's soil. Clearly Naaman believes in a world that can be divided into the sacred and profane. God makes no such distinction – and neither should we.

The universality and unconditional nature of God's love is underscored in today's Gospel from Luke (Luke 17:11-19). Like our first reading from 2nd Kings, Jesus makes no distinction based on nationality as to whom he heals. They ask for healing and healing is given. They are healed, because they are sick and as a testimony of the universality of God's love for all of humankind. Notice that the ungrateful are also healed, something we should keep in mind when judging who deserves our love. Be aware that Jesus doesn't receive universal acceptance for his indiscriminate love. When Jesus made reference to Naaman's healing on the Sabbath in his hometown synagogue, they drove him out of town and attempted to throw him off a cliff (Luke 4:16-30). Even though we are being called to this same kind of indiscriminate love and justice – don't expect any better treatment.

This mistreatment for teaching and living of the Gospel is the point of today's excerpt from St. Paul's letter (2 Timothy 2:8-13). The Gospel means 'good news', but many don't see it as such, because it means that we too need to change the hatred in our own hearts that leads to so much violence, prejudice, and war. The first step in changing the world is to look at our own motivations and to ask for the grace to love as God loves – unconditionally and universally. We need to be the love we seek in the world and where love is present – there is God.