

I

Good morning, and Happy Mother's Day to all our mothers and mother-figures in our fellowship of faith. On this special day, we would like to thank all of you who shape our lives and build our families and serve as our safe place as we go out into the world. Mothers have a unique power to influence their children no matter how old those children get.

Phil Keith, the former police chief of Knoxville, Tennessee, tells of receiving a call from his mother while he was in the middle of a televised press conference. Keith knew his mother wouldn't call him under those circumstances unless something was seriously wrong, so he excused himself from the press conference to answer the phone.

When his mother picked up the phone, she said, "Phil Keith, are you chewing gum?"

He said, "Um, yes, ma'am."

She said, "Well, it looks awful. Spit it out."

So, Police Chief Phil Keith spit out his gum and returned to finish the press conference. (1) Isn't it amazing the power mothers have over our lives? But if you ask most mothers, they'll say their power is very limited.

I read a true story from a mother who wanted to institute some bedtime limits on her four-year-old daughter. After a tough day, the mother announced firmly, "Tonight, we're putting on your PJs, brushing your teeth and reading ONE book . . ." with the emphasis on just one book. "Then, she said, "it's lights out!"

Her little girl snuggled up next to her and said, "Mommy, we learned in Sunday school about little boys and girls who don't have mommies and daddies."

As the mother's heart was melting over her little girl's appreciation, her daughter leaned closer and whispered, "Maybe you could go be THEIR mom." (2)

It's not easy being a Mom. But most of us have learned to appreciate the many sacrifices our moms have made in our behalf.

Jesus told his followers, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." Jesus' words are the model for us all: mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers, as well as children and siblings and friends. Because God loves us, we love one another. Because He forgives us, we forgive one another. At the center of the Gospel is the self-giving love of God.

Notice from our text the link between love and happiness. Jesus says to his disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be complete." Notice that love is essential to joy.

Fr Rich who was a Maryknoll Missionary before he was a VA Chaplain here speaks of a book called *Second Wind* that contains interviews with a number of overseas

missionaries. He expected to read about the hardships of their work. Instead, the book is a record of the joy these missionaries find in serving others.

A woman named Dona who serves a poor community in Tecate, Mexico, when asked about the eternal rewards of serving the poor, said, "I consider it a blessing to help the migrant workers. This is my joy and my reward. The eternal reward is in the hands of my Father in heaven." Dona wasn't trudging through her ministry while expecting a heavenly reward. She found joy in serving the needs of God's people today.

Another man interviewed in the book said, "God has adopted me into His family, and I have experienced new life. This is reward enough for me. If there is an eternal reward, then it is only *pan dulce de vida*, the sweet bread of life." Giving and receiving the love of God creates happiness now in the here and now.

So, what does it take to be happy? I can't give you a precise answer because it will vary according to our individual needs. I can say this, however: No one can truly be happy who is not in a proper relationship with God and with other people. It's hard to really be happy when you live only for yourself.

In 1938, a group of researchers at Harvard began the Harvard Study of Adult Development. The study, which has included interviews with over 700 men, began in 1938; it's been going on for more than eight decades. The goal of the study, begun during the Great Depression, is to discover what factors throughout a man's life are the "best predictors of happiness in later life."

Every two years, the men are asked to fill out a questionnaire concerning their physical and mental health, their work and relationships, and their plans for retirement. Every five years, the researchers gather health information on the men. And every five years or so, men are chosen randomly for in-depth interviews on the state of their lives.

Most of the study participants began the study in their late teens or early twenties. The few participants who are still alive are in their nineties. So, they've had plenty of time to examine their lives, their successes and failures and joys and heartbreaks.

So, what did they discover about the secret to happiness? The director of the Harvard study summed it up in two sentences: "Happiness is love. Full stop." The quality of the men's close relationships with others was the greatest predictor of happiness in later life. Let me say that again: The quality of the men's close relationships with others was the greatest predictor of happiness in later life. Everything else was a distant second.

(4)

Jesus served as an example of this truth more than 2,000 years ago. Even when he knew we would misunderstand him and reject him and fail him, he still chose to love us to the cross and beyond. In this Bible passage, Jesus is trying to share a life-changing truth with us: love is essential for happiness and joy. But Christ had another point to make about love: **Love requires sacrifice**. He explained it like this, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Few of us will ever be asked to die for the people we love. But to love people in the same manner that God loves them, we've got to lay down our selfishness and our prejudices and our grudges and, sometimes, even our so-called rights. It can take a lifetime to recognize and lay down all the barriers that stand between us and loving like Jesus loved us.

A few years ago, a young man was nearly arrested for climbing up the outside of a 19-story Philadelphia apartment building. This wasn't an extreme sport enthusiast. The apartment building was on fire, and the young man's mother was trapped inside.

The young man, Jermaine, didn't think twice when he began scaling the outer wall of the burning apartment building to rescue his mother. Jermaine's mother, who is bed-ridden, lived on the 15th floor, but police and firefighters were blocking the apartment doors, not letting anyone enter the burning building.

Jermaine reached his mother's balcony, where he was able to speak to her. He also directed firefighters to her apartment. They were able to rescue her before the fire reached her apartment. An officer told Jermaine that he could have been arrested for his actions, but he would let him go with a warning. As Jermaine said about his mother, "She's not surprised by the things that I do for her. She knows I'll go above and beyond." (5)

"She's not surprised by the things that I do for her. She knows I'll go above and beyond." That's the example of love that Jesus gave us. Jesus had one priority in life: to restore our relationship with God. And when we couldn't achieve that restoration through our own good works, Jesus gave up his life to secure our restoration through the sacrifice of his perfect, sinless life.

My Uncle Howard, a brilliant chemist, wanted his wife and then children to live comfortably and safely not in a house but a home. He and his wife, Rita found land in Southbury. He built a tiny house where the two of them lived, while after work he built their home. Every nail in the house was hammered in by him. Every piece of plumbing and electricity was installed by him. (I remember years visiting and having to use an outhouse. One daughter was born in the tiny house, the second was born in the two room wing which replaced the tiny house was a bedroom with kitchen and the other room was the living and play room. It was heated by a fireplace he built. It took him more than twenty years to build a beautiful HOME.

Just as the house was made a home where his family could grow, Jesus' cross provided safe passage between sinful humans and a holy, holy, holy God. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." Love requires sacrifice. We can't continue to define love superficially once we've seen Jesus' example of loving sacrificially. And he commands us to love others in the same way that he loves us.

Throughout history, the one driving force that has moved humanity forward has been the willingness of parents to make almost any sacrifice to ensure that their children would have a better life. But today a dramatic change is taking place. Recent studies show that a sizable portion of parents put their own happiness before that of their

children. Thus, you have mothers on drugs who ignore their little ones. And you have fathers who go off in search of their own dreams, leaving their families to fend for themselves. No wonder so many families are in crisis today.

Motivational speaker Tony Robbins says that one of the most inspiring people he has ever met is a Czechoslovakian woman named Alice Herz-Sommer. Alice was a hugely talented pianist and the oldest known survivor of the Holocaust. During World War II, Alice, who was Jewish, her husband, and her young son were imprisoned in a concentration camp. Her husband died in the camp, along with most of Alice's extended family and friends.

When the Nazi commanders over the camp discovered Alice's musical talents, they forced her to give piano concerts. Alice knew that her life and the life of her young son depended on her giving concerts for her Nazi captors.

Alice and her son did survive the camps and went on to live productive lives. Alice lived to 110 years old. And all those who knew her said that she radiated joy. She never developed a hatred for the Nazi regime that took her family and friends. She spoke often of the beauty of life, and how she was so grateful for every moment she had. (7)

The amazing thing about a woman like Alice Herz-Sommer is that her time in the concentration camp with her son did not leave her emotionally devastated. I believe it was her sacrificial love for her son that gave her hope and strength in the worst possible circumstances.

How can we, as followers of Jesus Christ, ignore the model that the Gospel provides for us? God so loved the world that He gave . . . Where there is no giving, there is no love. That is true within the family, that is true between friends, and that is true within society. A society in which everyone is looking out for Number 1 is a society in trouble.

Finally, I think Jesus is telling us in this passage: **Love is the very essence of our faith.** In verse 17 of our text Jesus says: "This is my command: Love each other." Paul would later write: "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing." That pretty well sums the matter up. If we cannot love others, our faith is a sham.

In the 6th century, a monk named Dorotheos preached a sermon on love to a group of monks who had become irritated and disillusioned with their religious community. They each claimed that it was the other men's annoying behavior that made it difficult for them to love their brothers in Christ. But Dorotheos knew better.

He asked them to visualize the world as a great circle whose center is God, and upon whose circumference lie human lives. "Imagine now," he asked them, "that there are straight lines connecting from the outside of the circle all human lives to God at the center. Can't you see that there is no way to move toward God without drawing closer to other people, and no way to approach other people without coming near to God?" (8)

That is well said, don't you think? "There is no way to move toward God without drawing closer to other people, and no way to approach other people without coming near to God." If we are having trouble loving other people, then we need to examine our relationship with Jesus. He is the source of sacrificial love. He is our example. As he loved us, so he commands us to love others. Love is the very essence of Christian faith. If we are not able to love, then there is something very superficial about our faith.

Sometimes the most difficult people to forgive are those closest to us. But there is Christ, hanging on the cross. And who did he die for? He died for imperfect people; like you and me. How tragic if we cannot forgive and accept those who love us, even as Christ has forgiven and accepted us.

Once I visited a statue in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, called *Christ of the Ozarks*. From a distance, the huge statue of the resurrected Jesus with his arms open wide looks like a giant cross. But was a little disappointed when I got closer to the statue. *Christ of the Ozarks* is made of cement, and it's starting to crack and crumble in places.

But the "deepest disappointment" came when up close that it had no scars. No nail marks. No whip marks. No evidence of how much Jesus' love for us cost him.

Yes, love and happiness are inseparable. But love requires sacrifice. Therefore, we must sacrifice in order to be happy. Love does not come easy in this imperfect world. But love is the central commandment that Christ gives to those who would be his disciples. It is what God made us for, and how God planned for us to operate in this world. If you don't know that kind of love, then please ask Jesus to be Lord of your life today and discover the love that makes life worth living.

1. From the Knoxville *News Sentinel*.

2. @Doc's Daily Chuckles, docsdailychuckle-join@freegroups.net to subscribe.

4. "An 80-Year Harvard Study Found the Greatest Predictor of Happiness in Later Life" by Reuben Westmaas, April 13, 2018, <https://curiosity.com/topics/an-80-year-harvard-study-found-the-greatest-predictor-of-happiness-in-later-life-curiosity/>.

5. "Man climbing 19-story building during fire was looking for mother" Maggie Kent, Action News/WPVI July 19, 2019. <https://6abc.com/man-scales-down-19-story-high-rise-during-west-philly-fire-/5404974/>.

7. Robbins, Tony. *Unshakeable: Your Financial Freedom Playbook* (p. 185). Simon & Schuster. Kindle Edition.

8. *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings*, trans. Eric P. Wheeler (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977), pp. 138-39 (paraphrase). Cited in Roberta C. Bondi, *Memories of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

II

Welcome on this Mother's Day 2015. All Moms are unique, of course. Joan Torello says her mother is notorious for her lead foot. Joan was not at all surprised to hear that a Georgia State Trooper pulled her mother over for speeding as she raced through the state on the way home from Florida.

Hoping to get off with a warning, Joan's mother tried to appear shocked when the officer walked up to her car. "I have never been stopped like this before," she said to the officer.

"What do they usually do, ma'am," he asked, "shoot the tires out?"

It's not easy being a Mom.

Consider the case of one stay-at-home Mom. One evening she went to a PTA meeting and her husband and her oldest daughter got together and decided they would clean up the kitchen for her. So they did. They put up all the food, wiped all the counters, washed all the pots and put them away, put the dishes in the dishwasher and ran it. They swept and mopped the floors and then sat down, and overcome by their own nobility, they awaited her arrival.

Two hours later she returned from the meeting, took off her coat, hung it up, walked through the kitchen into the den, grabbed the remote control, and began watching television. They followed her over to her chair and stood by her side. Finally she felt them looking over her shoulder and looked up at them and said, "What?"

Her husband said, "The kitchen."

"The kitchen. What?"

"The kitchen. We cleaned up the kitchen. Didn't you notice? It's sparkling clean. We cleaned it for you." The woman replied, "Yes, I noticed. Thankless job, isn't it?"

President Theodore Roosevelt said at the turn of the century:

When all is said, it is the **Mother**, and the **Mother** only, who is a better citizen than the soldier who fights for his country. The successful **Mother**, the **Mother** who does her part in rearing and training aright the boys and girls who are to be the men and women of the next generation, is of greater use to the community, and occupies, if she would only realize it, a more honorable as well as a more important position than any man in it. The **Mother** is the one supreme asset of the national life. She is more important, by far, than the successful statesman, or businessman, or artist, or scientist

I heard an amusing story recently about a Southern Baptist pastor who answered his telephone one day and heard a man's voice. "Please send six cases of whiskey to my house," said the voice. "We're having a party." To say the least, the pastor was surprised. Southern Baptist pastors are not in the habit of delivering cases of whiskey to people's homes. Even more surprising, he recognized the voice as being that of one of

his deacons. Evidently the deacon had been calling a liquor store and dialed his pastor's home by mistake.

"Brother Jones," the pastor said to the man on the other end of the line, "This is your pastor."

It got real quiet on the other end of the line, "Well, pastor," asked the deacon. "What are you doing at the liquor store?"

Pastors get surprises sometimes. Some are pleasant surprises; some are not so pleasant. And some surprises turn your whole world upside down. Our lesson today from Acts 10 is about a surprise that turned the world upside down for the early church.

Up until the time of today's lesson Christianity had for the most part been a Jewish sect. Samaritans were welcome, for they were regarded as half-Jews. But, before Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, no Gentiles had been welcomed into the fraternity. And the Ethiopian's baptism took place out in the wilderness, far from Jerusalem. Who would even know?

Our story today begins with a Roman centurion named Cornelius, a man described by Luke, the author of Acts, as devout and generous. And he was a Gentile. Cornelius had a vision, a vision of an angel instructing him to send for a man named Simon Peter who was staying in a home in Joppa. Cornelius heeded the angel's instructions and sent three of his men to Joppa to bring Peter back with them.

While the three men were on their journey, something extraordinary was happening in Joppa. This same Simon Peter had gone up to the roof of the house where he was staying to pray and he, too, had a vision. "He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' 'Surely not, Lord!' Peter replied. 'I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.' The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven." While Peter was pondering this vision, the three men sent by Cornelius arrived at the house where Peter was staying. And the Spirit spoke to Peter telling him to go with the three men.

The next day Peter did just that, taking with him a few of his Christian friends. When they got to the house of Cornelius, they found a large group of people gathered there, relatives and close friends of Cornelius. At first, this disturbed Peter. These were Gentiles. It was against Jewish law for him to even associate with Gentiles. But then Peter remembered his dream. God had shown him that he should not call anyone impure or unclean. He asked Cornelius why he had sent for him. Cornelius proceeds to tell him about his own vision--about the angel who had instructed him to send for Peter. Then he told Simon Peter that he was prepared to listen to anything he had to say.

Then Peter began to speak. And he begins with some remarkable words. He says, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right . . ."

"God does not show favoritism . . ." That's a radical statement even today. Every group I know expects God to show partiality to its own group. Even at football games, people want God to favor their team. Two thousand years ago in Judea, this was a particularly important theme. The Jewish people had survived by being exclusive. And even the early Christian church restricted itself to those who were circumcised Jews. Now Peter was disregarding all that. No one is to be regarded as impure or unclean. It was an amazing turnabout. Then Peter begins to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. It was the testimony of one who had experienced Christ's coming--up close and personal. This brings us to our lesson for today:

"While Peter was still speaking these words," says the writer of Acts, "the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message." In other words, Peter didn't even get to finish his message. He was just getting warmed up when the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles gathered there in Cornelius' house, much like it came upon the Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Suddenly these Gentiles were speaking in different languages just as they had spoken in different languages on that day when the church was born. It was an amazing event. Luke tells us that the "circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, 'Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ . . ."

Peter had no idea when he awoke the day before what lay in store for him over the next 36 hours. The whole mission of the Christian community had been turned on its head. Things would never again be the same. That's what happens when the Spirit moves. Things are changed. People are changed. Social situations change.

So often, over the past half-century when we have come to this story, we have emphasized the inclusiveness of the Gospel. That's understandable. Peter suddenly realized that all people were God's children, and that he dare not refuse baptism to any because of their cultural or racial background. This truth has been particularly important to us since the days of the Civil Rights movement. It spoke to us of the injustices in our own society.

Pastor Gregory Bloomquist tells of being in a movie theater when the classic film, *In the Heat of the Night*, was first being shown. For those of you too young to remember *In the Heat of the Night*, it is set in Sparta, Mississippi during a time when the South was just emerging from the dark days of segregation. A murder has been committed. Rod Steiger plays sheriff Bill Gillespie, a good lawman despite his racial prejudices. When Virgil Tibbs played by Sidney Poitier, a well-dressed northern African-American, comes to town, Gillespie instinctively puts him under arrest as a murder suspect. Tibbs then

reveals that he is a Philadelphia homicide detective. Tibbs offers to help in Gillespie's investigation. As the clues and suspects mount, Gillespie and his deputies develop begrudging respect for this Yankee, black officer.

In one scene Detective Tibbs and Sheriff Gillespie pay a visit to the wealthiest man in the town. He is clearly cut from the same cloth as any slave owner of a hundred years earlier. He is also a suspect, in Tibbs' mind, in the murder. When the white landowner realizes that Tibbs suspects him of murder, he slaps him. Without blinking Virgil Tibbs, the African-American northerner slaps him right back.

Pastor Bloomquist says that when he saw this film in the 1960s that scene caused audible gasps in the movie theater. But, it was not the slapping of Tibbs that caused the gasp; it was Tibbs reaction and subsequent slapping of the landowner that caused the gasps--a black man slapping a white man. That was something that just wasn't done, says Bloomquist. In fact, the landowner says to Tibbs: "I could have had you shot for that." But, realizing the sheriff is there, the landowner turns to the sheriff and says to him: "Well, sheriff, what are you going to do about it?" thinking that the sheriff will take Tibbs and see that he is put away for good. The sheriff, however, looks for words and says: "Well, well, I don't know what I'm going to do." (1) And he probably didn't know what he was going to do. What he did know was this--his world w

The Civil Rights movement was a shock to American society, but who can doubt it was led by the Spirit of God? When the Spirit moves, walls come down. So generally when we come to this text, that's the first thing we see is how the Spirit batters down the walls that separate people.

But we might also see what this move by the Spirit did for the church. When Peter baptized Cornelius and the other Gentiles, it opened the church to astounding growth. Soon those from Gentile backgrounds far outnumbered those from Jewish backgrounds. Imagine if Christianity had remained a Jewish sect. Would we have had the same impact on the world? Not by a long shot. Can we not see that inclusiveness is not simply a politically correct approach to life? Inclusiveness is part of God's plan for establishing God's Kingdom. This is the reason Christ came into the world- -to reach out to all people.

One of the hot questions in American society today is, what shall we do about illegal immigration? That is a political question. Let the politicians answer it. Here's the religious question: What if you and I encounter illegal immigrants? How should we treat them? The answer is, we treat them as Peter did Cornelius. We treat them with respect as children of God. We don't have a choice if we are followers of Jesus. We share with them the love of Christ, and if there is any chance that we can bring them into our fellowship, then we issue an invitation, and if they accept that invitation, then we give them a Christian embrace. That's who we are. That's what being the church is all about. That's what the Kingdom of God is all about. As followers of Jesus, our primary goal is not to preserve American culture but to minister to people, all people, and to share in the coming of God's Kingdom. This is not to disparage those who hold legitimate

concerns about our porous borders. It is to say that our priority as the church of Jesus Christ is to reach out to all people regardless of who they are or what they've done or where they came from. We are to do this so that the kingdoms of this world might become the Kingdom of our God. Inclusiveness is right at the heart of the Gospel. "God so loved the world . . ." You can't get more inclusive than that.

How does the Kingdom of God come? Let me tell you a story. About twenty years ago, a high school youth group headed out on their annual work camp and backpacking trip at Blue Lake Youth Camp. One of the boys who went along on that trip was from another church and didn't really know the youth or the adult leaders. His name was Ben, and he was, to put it kindly, a challenge. The leaders had been given the heads-up on Ben. He was a troubled young man who was often belligerent toward people in positions of authority. It was no mystery why he acted that way; his father was serving time in prison. The minister from Ben's church had begged the youth leaders to include Ben because he believed the experience would be good for him.

The leaders, Bob and Margie, were nervous when the trip began, but it turned out to be a positive experience. Ben had a couple of minor outbursts along the way, but Bob and Margie were patient with him and they treated him with more kindness than he was accustomed to experiencing. A few weeks following the trip, Ben got back together with the group to share pictures and remembrances of their special time together. That was the last time the group saw him.

Sixteen years later, Bob went back to Blue Lake Camp. While he was there, he noticed a man working on one of the cabins. He went over to the man and struck up a conversation, and it turned out that it was Ben. His story unfolded. After high school Ben went into the Marines, and then after serving six years in the Marines he went to college, where he later graduated with honors. Currently he's married, and he is in charge of the local school district's computer labs. He told Bob that the work camp experience, sixteen years earlier, had been a pivotal event in his life. It was the

first time he could remember being appreciated by others and included in a group. He still cherishes the memories of that trip and the way Bob and Margie cared for him. Bob was stunned, because he had practically forgotten the trip and he had no idea what effect they had on this young man. (2) A camping experience had changed a young man's life.

Now here's what's important: Ben's name could have been Jose or, if he had been a she, it could have been Chamiqua. It doesn't make any difference. Only one thing matters, that the followers of Jesus Christ share his love with all people--young people or old, rich people or poor, black, brown or white, from educated families or from families where Dad is in prison, all people--until that day comes when every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God. This is our task. That is our reason for being. We have no other.

1. Holy Thursday (Year A), St. Mark the Evangelist Anglican Church, Ottawa, ON
(March 28, 2002

L.[http://www.bloomquist.ca/publications/Church%20materials/holy%20thursday%20year%20a %202002.html](http://www.bloomquist.ca/publications/Church%20materials/holy%20thursday%20year%20a%202002.html)

2. Charlotte Ann Russell, "Summer Prayer," preached at First Congregational Church of Berkeley on July 26, 1998. Dr. Gregory Knox Jones.

<http://chesterpres.org/osermons/s110401.htm>

III *This material is used with permission of its author, Rev. Msgr. Joseph A. Pellegrino, Diocese of St. Petersburg, FL*

Back in the Middle Ages there was an alchemist who had achieved notable fame for his intellectual prowess. For want of a better name, we'll call him Justin of Bieberland. Now, usually when we think of alchemy, we focus on the attempts of alchemists to create gold, but actually the alchemists attempted much more than that. They were really the first inorganic chemists. And Justin was one of the best. He understood the properties of mercury, how to best transform various elements into energy and so forth. The problem was that Justin was so intelligent that people were afraid of him. He was too smart for them. So people avoided him. Especially, female people. Now Justin really wanted to have a wife and family, but how could he convince a fair lass to marry him? So, being a scientist, Justin set to work on creating an elixir of love. After months and months of meticulous work, he finally had a finished product. Justin did have one friend, an older alchemist. And this friend had a beautiful young daughter. Justin told his friend that he had made a wonderful discovery and would like to show it to him, perhaps at dinner at the friend's house. So, Justin was invited. He brought his elixir. During the meal he made up a story of how he had created a potion that would bring happiness to young maidens. He and the girl's father convinced her to try it.

The girl drank the elixir. Then she began to see Justin through different eyes. After a few months she was open to Justin's proposal of marriage. So Justin married his beautiful girl, and soon they had their own family of three wonderful children. Now you would think that they would live happily ever after. But they didn't. Justin had everything he ever wanted, but he was not happy. In fact he became more and more sullen and depressed. And eventually he became angry, frustrated and mean spirited. Why? Because throughout the years he was plagued with a question. It became an all-consuming obsession. The question he kept asking himself over and over was this: Would she have ever loved me if she had not drank the elixir?

Our society perpetuates the great lie that love can be won through an elixir. The elixir may be becoming a professional who makes a great deal of money. Money is supposed to guarantee that happiness can be bought. Or the elixir might be that having the perfect body will attract lasting love. But the beautiful bodies of the young become the bodies of the middle aged. And that six pack chest turns into a full keg stomach. Commercials try to convince us that the right perfume or cologne will do the job. That's as close to an ancient elixir as you can come. But a good job never won anyone love, and a beautiful body may attract another person but it isn't going to win his or her love. And folks, a famous perfume like El Stinko #5 is not going to be a love magnet.

Today's 2nd reading from the *First Letter of John*, and the Gospel from *John 15* both speak about love, Christian love. Christian love is not forced on a person. It isn't due to an elixir, nor does it come merely from physical attraction, or any other attraction for that matter. Love, true love, lasting love, only results from the Love of

Christ. And that love becomes a magnet. If a person loves the Lord, that love itself will attract other people who are seeking the Lord. Perhaps it will attract a person who is looking for someone to make a life with, certainly it will attract many others who are looking for the meaning to life.

I want you to consider St. Teresa of Calcutta. Her work among the poorest of the poor spread throughout the world. Her religious order, the Missionaries of Charity, became the fastest growing religious order in the Church. Why were so many people attracted to Mother Teresa? Certainly they felt called to join her in making *Matthew 25* a reality: "...when I was hungry you gave me food to eat, when I was thirsty you gave me drink, etc." But there was even more than this that attracted people to Mother Teresa. They were drawn by Jesus' love within her. And like a magnet, that love flowed through her into them. And then they attracted others to Christ. The love of Christ flowed through her into them. It still does.

We have been attracted by the dynamism, the magnetism of Jesus Christ. We know that saying that we love Him is not enough. We have to live His Love. In the Gospel Jesus uses this phrase: "Remain in my love." He tells us that we remain in His Love if we keep His commandments. But Jesus doesn't give a whole list of commandments like Moses did when he came down from Mt. Sinai. Jesus just gives one commandment: Love one another.

That is all that really matters, if we love each other, truly, in the sacrificial love of the Lord, everything else falls into place. St. Augustine put it this way: "Once and for all, a short rule is laid down for you: Love and do what you will. If you keep silence, do it out of love. If you cry out, do it out of love. If you refrain from punishing, do it out of love. Let the root of love be within you. From such a root, nothing but good can come." (From St. Augustine's sermon on 1 John 7).

So, we are concerned about this or that member of the family. Maybe he or she is in a bad relationship, or behaving badly. If we strike out at them, let them feel our wrath for the people they are hurting, we will accomplish nothing. But if instead we allow the magnetism within us to be evident in our concern for them, and we seek the ways that we can best expose them to the love of Christ, eventually, over time, Christ will prevail. The Easter message is that Jesus is the Victor. Christ wins. He always wins.

Another example: we are invited to join an activity which is immoral; and we decline respectfully, but lovingly. A close friend asks us to join him or her. And we say, "I have to tell you what is happening inside of me. I just can't reconcile going there and doing that with the deep love for God I feel within me. It just is not me. It is not my style." And we leave it at that, then the person we are speaking to might eventually, someday, also say, "I want that deep love of God in my life."

Jesus Christ is the Elixir of Love. He is the potion that brings happiness. We pray today for the courage to love His Presence so much that His Love will flow through us and attract others to love as He Loves.