'The Lord our God is Lord alone!’ - ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

I stand here in awe of a God of unconditional love, a God who unceasingly calls our entire self – our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength - to love him not in isolation but socially in loving covenant. A covenant where God alone is worshiped, where God alone is glorified through our relationship with others.

Ever since the dawn of his creation, God has been calling us, to become attached to him, to embrace him like a child to a father or mother. We know Moses heard God’s call. “Fear the Lord, your God” he said to the Israelites, “and keep throughout all the days of your lives, all his statutes and commandments.”

“Fear the Lord” is one of those expressions that doesn’t translate well today. It’s not code for authoritarian rule, bondage, or curbing our freedom. It’s a respectful recognition that God’s knowledge is infinite, his wisdom beyond all understanding.
It’s like when one of our parental units asks us to just listen and do what they say. It’s in these moments that we’re being asked to trust completely, to be cared for in ways beyond our grasp. We are being led to a good place, a safe place, a place where love flourishes and happiness. You see we learn to love only by experiencing love in totally trusting relationships.

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to spend 5 days in northern Georgia with the Trappist monks of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit. I went to their beautiful Monastery to fulfill the final requirement of my diaconal formation, 5 days of rest, listening to the Spirit, and worshipping God. Each day I joined with the monks for community prayer and Mass.

The monks there have dedicated themselves to the worship of God in a life mostly hidden from the outside world. They lead their lives in a stable community. Each one has everything in common with their neighbor. Truly brothers, they bear each other's burdens, and as they do, participate in and draw strength from Christ’s sufferings. These Trappist monks experience love of God and love of neighbor in every waking moment.

A quick look around at the faces in this holy place proves that I didn’t have to drive to Georgia to find others who have detached themselves, in one degree or another, from thoughts and actions which compete for God’s time and attention. There are many here who do everything they can to Christ first, and give to others without any expectation or desire of getting something in return.
Take for example Miss Dorothy Webster, the eldest child of Mark & Jingjing Webster. She and Ross McKnight, her fiancé of just over a week, have modeled their courtship on the way of Jesus. They have and continue to learn love by *experiencing* love. Thank you Mark and Jingjing for being such a powerful witness of Christian service to your children.

When I started this journey 5 years ago, Karen and I really had no idea of what lay in store for us. I am still amazed at the amount of sacrificing and yes, suffering, that Karen withstood as she took on so many of the responsibilities that I used to do. But throughout it all, she’s been in it with all her heart, mind, soul, and strength. Her capacity to love and our marriage has grown in ways she nor I could never imagine. I’m humbled by the power of God’s love. Thank you Karen for trusting in me and in our God.

The Trappist Monks of Conyers, the ever growing Webster family, and my beautiful bride Karen are all living proof that is impossible to love God without going beyond ourselves and loving others. The two cannot be separated.

The readings we heard today clearly and powerfully make known this radical truth. God is God alone. We love God by loving our neighbor. We love our neighbor by participating fully in their lives. We participate fully in the lives of others when we actively seek the way, the truth, and the life of Christ Jesus.
Pope Paul VI said “when we are with our neighbors, we listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times and interpret them in the light of God’s word, in order that the revealed truth may be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and more suitably presented.”

Let us gather round this table with single-minded purpose and undivided heart, seeking a love that is everlasting and paved with joy and happiness. And let us leave here today recognizing evermore the need to immerse ourselves in service to others and the power of the Holy Spirit.

© Copyright - T. di Stefano - 2012
All rights reserved. No reproduction without permission.