

PASTOR'S WEEKLY MESSAGE FOR THE 4TH SUNDAY OF LENT B

“God sent his Son not to condemn.”

In the first reading today, we hear about God's anger. We are told that: “At last the wrath of the Lord rose so high against His people.” Wrath is really anger. Can God be so angry against His people? Why is God angry? We find it difficult to understand God's anger when we read and hear so much about His love. In the second reading today, Paul tells us: “God loved us with so much love that He was generous with His mercy; when we were dead through our sins, He brought us to life with Christ.” And in the Gospel, John tells us the same thing: “Yes, God so loved the world so much that He gave His only Son. God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through Him the world might be saved.” Can it be that God is angry with the very people He loves? How are we to understand God's anger?

God is not angry with us. He loves us “so much.” He is angry at what prevents us from receiving His love. Let us hear again the words we read in the first reading: “The Lord tirelessly sent them messenger after messenger, since He wished to spare His people.” God does not want to punish or to condemn. God wants to spare. God gets angry when He can not be as good to us as He wishes to be; as good to us as He knows we need Him to be. This is what sin does...it tries to prevent us from opening our hearts to God to receive all that He wants to give us. All His gifts and blessings, all His love and forgiveness.

This is something really amazing: God loves us, and He is always ready to forgive us, BUT we need to accept His love. We need to ask for His forgiveness. If you think of it, it is a little like our human relationships. If you love somebody very much, but that person does not accept your love, can there be any friendship between the two of you? You know that it is not possible, until you agree to it. It is the same with God. He is our Father. He loves us more than the best father can love his children. He treats us with tenderness and mercy. His forgiveness knows no limits, no time, no distance. No obstacle or barrier can prevent Him from loving us, *except* our own refusal. This refusal is the work of sin in us. This makes God angry because He knows how happy we would be if only we allowed Him to love us as much as He wants.

Sin, like cancer, eats away at God's life within us. It prevents us from having this full life that Jesus came to bring to us. Sin makes poor what was rich in us. It makes ugly what was beautiful. It makes weak what was strong. Sin makes God angry because it destroys what God's love has been building with so much care and concern. God does not want to condemn anyone. He has sent His Son to save us. And Paul reminds us that: “It is by grace that you have been saved, not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God.”

We could not save ourselves. We needed to be saved. God saved us, freely, without our doing anything for it. Another word for grace is merciful love. It is God's merciful love that has brought us back to Him. This is the meaning of being saved: it is to be brought back to God, coming back '*home*.' "God gave us a place with Him (Christ) in Heaven," Paul tells us. Our place is waiting for us, prepared by God's love, in His home which will be our *true* home.

This is why we should not be afraid of God; not afraid of God's anger. On the contrary, we should return to Him, sure that He wants to see us back more than we, ourselves, wish to return. We will soon be celebrating the Feast of Easter... It is good to prepare ourselves by meeting God in the Sacrament of Penance, by going to Confession. Don't be afraid to go to Confession. Look at God's love. Look back on all the blessings and gifts He has given you already. And see Him waiting for you with arms outstretched to welcome you back. What remains for you to do now, is to go to the Father and receive the forgiveness He offers you.