

30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 29, 2017

Exodus 22:20-26/1 Thessalonians 1:5-10/ Matthew 22:34-40

It's wonderful to be back at St Perpetua's, especially this year. My Mom passed away at the beginning of the month and I finally had time yesterday to work on the acknowledgement and thank you notes before attending your Pastor's School Auction "Gilligan's Island" Dinner with some wonderful parishioners last night.

My Mom suffered from dementia and my Dad does too. Mom's was worse. One of the nurses at Sunrise Care Facility a few years ago wanted to prepare us for the day Mom would not recognize us. She shared that her mother had died from Alzheimer's and like our family her father faithfully visited her mom almost every day. Near the end her mom rarely spoke, but two weeks before passing, she looked up at her husband and said: *"Sir, I do not know who you are, but I know I love you."*

The nurse said those beautiful words were a comfort to her family during the funeral. It fits some Scripture so well: *"For Love is strong as Death"* from the Song of Songs — from I Corinthians: *"So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."* — and especially today's Gospel:

*"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."*

Our love of God is to be a commitment and vocation so complete that even if our minds go, we are still loving with heart and soul.

Parents never stop teaching and I would like to share the last lesson Mom taught me.

A few years ago there was a stage in the dementia that lasted at least six months when Mom and Dad still knew each other but had forgotten the hurts and wounds that were part of their married life. Mom would tell Dad how much she loved him, and Dad would tell Mom how he was the luckiest man in the world to have married her. And because of the

dementia, they repeated this - and enjoyed it - several times every visit. We kids watched in amazement: *"Who are these people? I don't remember them talking like this when we were growing up."* I even asked Dad once: *"Don't you remember how bad things got around cocktail hour?"* And he said *"No."*

It was beautiful and healing to see them enjoy their earliest memories of love, amplified by sixty-three years of being together.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God says: *"I will forgive their iniquities and remember their sins no more."* (Hebrews 8:13).

Before witnessing this period in Mom and Dad's life, I used to think the primary quality of the Divine memory must be God's ability to remember everything, all of time and space even at the molecular level. *"Even the hairs on our heads are counted"* Jesus said. But now I believe the most beautiful quality of God's perfect memory isn't its infinite capacity but its ability to forget at will. When we are contrite and ask for forgiveness, Scripture says God not only forgives our offenses but *forgets* them.

Imagine standing before God at the pearly gates and, after our entire lives flashed before us, saying to God, *"But don't you remember when I did this and did that?"* And God saying, *"Well no, you were contrite and confessed those sins. I forgot those things years ago. You are the only one who remembers them now."*

Forgiving to the point of forgetting is not something humanity does easily. No wonder Jesus says it may take not 7 but 77 times for us to really forgive. Yet if we did forgive to the point of forgetting, imagine how different our relationships would be, ... our world would be. This kind of forgiveness is a hard thing to do. But I can't believe it can only be done through a disease of the mind. Mom and Dad got me to revisit the resentments, wounds and grudges that are really toxic to my own wellbeing and peace. Forgiveness is the handmaiden of love and the best way to embrace the today's Gospel:

*"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

Fr. Ken McKenna, OSFS  
Provincial, Toledo-Detroit Province  
Oblates of St. Francis de Sales