

## Commentary to the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time C



Message: Living God's plan means to learn love.

Last week we talked about forming a plan - or to put it better, discovering God's plan. It could be a life plan - for example, God might call a young man to marry and form a family. On the other hand, God may only reveal a short plan: some area of study or a job with a goal of serving or gaining financial resources. God lets us know his intention by asking him, that is by prayer - as individuals, families and as a parish family. Forming a plan requires daily prayer.

For this week, I am going to assume you have some sense of God's purpose for you. In this homily I'd like to address living that plan. We see it in the readings: God speaks to the boy Jeremiah about the design for him - even when he was no bigger than a tadpole. Now, on the brink of adulthood, God tells him to stand up and cincture his belt. God has work for him and it won't be easy. The young man will run into obstacles. People will oppose him, beat him down. But lift up your head, God says. I will strengthen you like a pillar of iron. If you read the whole book of Jeremiah you know he faced trials - including being tossed into a pit. And they left him to sink into muck at the bottom.

Jeremiah represents what we should expect when we respond to God's plan. We will face attacks, sometimes from other people, sometimes from demonic powers.

When Jesus begins his public ministry, like Jeremiah, he faces attacks. In a couple of weeks we will hear how Satan attacks at the very beginning. Those onslaughts don't let up. For Jesus' entire ministry he battles demons. People also attack him, including those closest - the ones he grew up with. We hear today that they want to throw him off a cliff. Notice Jesus does not shout, he doesn't get violent or aggressive, he doesn't curse. He simply walks between them and continues his mission. If they don't want me, others do.

How different from you and me! I will speak for myself. If I receive a put-down or rejection, I start brooding. People are so ungrateful! :( Instead of turning sour, I need to do two things: One, ask if I can learn something from the rejection. Two, recall there are people who do need me. As Mother Teresa used to tell her Sisters when they felt like moping, "Get out with the people."

I think of my predecessor, removed from the priesthood. I said to him, "Michael, this must be terrible." He replied, "Well, God has given me 44 years as a priest. I'm looking forward to his plan for the next 44 years!"

All of us face trials, disappointments, even devastation. The question is: How do we deal with those contradictions? The first thing is to recognize that God allows those trials for a purpose: so we can learn love.

You might think, "I know how to love!" Really? Let's listen again: Love is kind and patience.\*

It doesn't brag and get puffed up.\*

It's not quick tempered, rude or self-serving.\*

Love doesn't brood over injuries.\*

It takes no joy in doing wrong, but rejoices in the truth.\*

Then he concludes: "Love bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

From Paul's description we can see that love is more than a feeling. Don't get me wrong. Emotions are important. We move on an ocean of feelings. Like waves they toss us one way and another. We should do everything we can to promote positive emotions. But when all is said and done, love is not a feeling. Love is a decision. Even more, love is grace: something beyond human capacity. St. Paul calls love a charism - a gift from God. We have to ask God for that gift.

You have probably heard about the studies showing that couples who go to Mass together have a much greater possibility of a lasting marriage. If a couple worships together and prays together every day, that marriage is practically unbreakable. Even something as simple as joining hands for an Our Father or thanking God before meals; if a couple prays together, the marriage will last.

Romance is good, but marriage needs something more: The great romance, Jesus the Bridegroom. By prayer we connect with Jesus. That's the way we live his plan.

We'll see more next week as we wrap up this series on making a new beginning. A fresh start involves discovering God's plan and taking the first step to living it. Here's today's message: Living God's plan means to learn love: more than a feeling, love is a decision - love ultimately is gift, a gift we receive by prayer. Let's conclude with Paul's words: "So faith, hope, love remain, but the greatest of these is love." Amen.

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