

HOMILY - 4th SUNDAY OF LENT [B]

[Re-gifting Jesus]

As most of us know, re-gifting is what we call receiving a gift from someone, only to give it later to someone else as a gift from us. One young woman received a mall gift card without any amount on it. She decided to use it the next time she was at the mall. When she went to check out, instead of an even amount like \$25 or \$50, the card had \$13.67 left on it. It had been re-gifted.

We heard about another sort of gift in today's Gospel: The gift of Jesus Christ. The words from John's Gospel have almost become a cliché in today's world – even as the world ignores their true meaning. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.* We see the verse and chapter put up on a poster from time to time at football games, but what is going on here? What does this really mean?

There are three points to take from today's readings – all of them important for our souls. These points are: (1) God loves each one of us so much that he gave us his only Son, (2) Jesus in turn gave himself to us to set us free, (3) We are, in turn, to give ourselves to others to help us all reach eternal life.

How is God giving us his only Son a gift to us? Imagine that you personally know and are close friends with the richest person on the planet. Now imagine that this person has just told you that you could anything at all to make you happy. Whatever you might choose – would it really bring lasting peace, happiness and joy?

The greatest gift we could ever receive is one that completes, fulfills and perpetually satisfies us. It is a gift that brings to an end any further desire for anything or anyone else. It is the gift that God gave the human race in his only Son. When we center our lives on our Lord, we come to know peace and strength – the confidence that flows from being kind and forgiving, just as he is.

Some may say that there have been other wise and kind teachers who have appeared in human history. But there is a key difference. The gift of Jesus Christ by the Father was not only a gift of someone who teaches with goodness and mercy, but beyond that, a person who claimed that if we followed and believed in him, we would live with him forever in the Father's house. This truly is a one of a kind gift from God to us.

From this original gift flows another gift - the gift of Jesus himself to us. What does it mean to us today that Jesus came into our world two millennia ago? In sum, it is the only good answer to the world's approach to life, which is essentially based on fear. The world wants us to believe that we are in this on our own, that no one really cares and that might and money is all that is needed.

With our Lord, we know that none of this is true. With Jesus firmly in our lives, we know that we can live and thrive by being kind, patient and forgiving. The way through this life is to try to form the same kind of relationship with Jesus that Jesus has with the Father. It is only when Jesus becomes a daily presence, a constant companion on the journey of life that we can begin to live and let go of fear.

On the other hand, many Christians seem to think that because they believe that Jesus is the Son of God, they are saved and no matter what, they will go to heaven when they die. This has always seemed a bit presumptuous to me, because where does that leave Judgment Day? Where does that leave the Pharisee-like Christian who follows the rules, but still despises those who are different and ignores the poor?

Sometimes, it can seem like accepting Jesus as our Savior is just a slogan, because our lives still seem to be stuck. Like the Israelites taken into captivity in Babylon, we can seem to wait and wait. But, what if we saw the whole plan (like God does)- what if we could look around the corner and see that we were waiting because other pieces of the puzzle of our lives had to be put into place *before* we could move on?

One of the greatest things Jesus does for us is to teach us *to surrender our lives to God*. Yes, we must continue living out our lives here and being responsible for those in our care, yet all that is based on trusting that God will provide what we need if we ask for it in faith and then wait for God to act. Jesus went to his death trusting in the Father's love for him, and that trust led to the Resurrection. *Nothing is impossible with God*.

This leads us to the final gift – the re-gifting of Jesus to other people. Even receiving the gift of the Son from the Father is not enough. We are not to leave this at a “Jesus-and-me” state. Instead, we are to *re-gift the gift of Jesus to others*. How do we do that?

Today's second reading gives us the clue. St. Paul told the Ephesians: *We are God's handiwork, for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them*. What Paul is telling them is that it is up to us. If the gift of Jesus is not to be wasted on us – if it is not to be just a slogan we claim to live by – then it is up to each one of us to pass on the gift we have received.

John's Gospel today picks this up by telling us: *Whoever lives the truth comes to the light*. This word “truth,” is the same word Pilate threw back at Jesus during his trial – *What is truth?* But there is a truth – and it does set us free from fear and loneliness. It is the truth that God does love us, that he gave us Jesus as our model, and that every person created is necessary – we are all to help each other. When we can live the truth, we are re-gifting Jesus. Living a life of kindness and humility frees us to look to help others rather than worrying about ourselves.

Let us all then, as Christians, give the gift that we have been given; the gift of Jesus Christ, who came into the world not to judge but to save; who came to serve and not to be served and who offered himself up that we may have life eternal. This isn't an impossible goal – all we need do is remember this phrase:

HUMANKIND: Be Both.