

July 1 & 2, 2017  
13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

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### Prioritizing Love

Jesus said to the Apostles:

*“Whoever loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me and whoever loves son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”*

We know that Jesus often used hyperbole to get his point across; but just what was Jesus trying to say in today’s Gospel from Matthew?

Spiritual writers, in a variety of ways, say that the human person is “hardwired for God.” It is a way of denying secular assumptions that humanity can be reduced to physical, social and psychological components...; we’re *more than* that. We all have a *spiritual* dimension that is ultimately grounded in God! Now it’s important to point out that the words ‘*spiritual*’ and ‘*religious*’ do **not** refer to the same thing: *all* people have a spiritual component – and religion can enhance or deter it!

In the Biblical tradition, the fact that people are “hardwired for God” means there is a God-drive that has to be respected in each person. But, there are other drives within us too: physical drives ... for food, drink, air, sex; social drives... to belong, to be in relationship, to be accepted; that are perfectly natural. These physical and social drives swirl about within our unique psychic constellations. Our mind – at both unconscious and conscious levels – sorts out and prioritizes these drives. The human challenge is to get these human drives in right order – in balance.

From a Biblical perspective, the raw material for wrong ordering of these drives is called idolatry. We don’t reserve the God-drive for God, but rather attach it to money or family or social position or even food or sex or alcohol or drugs or ... whatever. We then ask these finite realities that are often natural and good in and of themselves, to do for us what only God can do for us. We ask – and assume – that they can and do give us ultimate worth, meaning and life.

I can remember visiting with a young man in his 20s, in the throes of an addiction to crack cocaine. Describing his drug use he clearly stated to me:

“Crack is my love; crack is my God; ... crack is God!”

While this is perhaps an extreme example of idolatry, it certainly makes the point: When we attach the God-drive onto things that are not God – those things begin to disappoint: because God is the ultimate drive and the finite realities of life that are good, are wonderful – family, for example – cannot give us ultimate worth, meaning and life... .

Those of us from the 60's will remember the question: "What's it all about, Alfie?" Or, we can talk about the hole in the sand...; or: Isn't there more to life than this? ...in the midst of our mid-life crisis... .

St. Matthew writes: "Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break-in and steal."

In other words: the perishable world does not ... cannot fill our hunger for the imperishable.

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In today's Gospel, Jesus insists that life will only flow properly if ultimate allegiance is given to God. This is the true home of the God-drive: the anchoring that puts everything and everyone else – including mother, father, spouse, child – in its proper place. In other words: *if our family becomes our God, they will ultimately disappoint us because we're asking them to give us something they cannot give us.* We must see through the temptation to make them or anything else our 'God.'

One more point: When family, social, physical, psychological and societal drives are in right order with the ultimate God-drive, they become the relationships where the one-loved-by-God, loves others! When the God-drive is our ultimate drive – being expressed in relationships of compassion and just actions – then things fall into place ...; and life – The-Life-of-God-in-us – flows rightly: "In good times and bad, richer or poorer, in sickness and health, ...until death do us part"!

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It is often said that a homily should always conclude with something practical for us to do. Well, this 4th of July weekend is sort of the unofficial beginning of real summer. Perhaps we might reflect a bit on the right ordering of things in our lives; and cultivate and nurture the spiritual – the 'God-drive' – component of our lives, which in turn then cultivates and nurtures the other relationships and drives of our lives.

Amen!