

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 25, 2023

I want you to think for a second about the **person you love most in this world**. Take a moment. Who do you love most in this world? (pause) For many of you, it's probably your **husband or wife**. After all, that's someone you chose, someone you selected from countless others, someone you promised to stand by and cherish and love for the rest of your life. And for those of you who would **STILL** pick that **same person** if you met them today, you probably have no problem declaring them the absolute "love of your life". That's a pretty great feeling, a wonderful reality to have present throughout a couple's many years together. Loving a spouse gratefully, generously, continually, easily, and not reluctantly is one of the **greatest gifts we can ever give** (and receive).

Well, you know what? **God loves you more.**

Or maybe the person or persons you love the most are your **children**. Most of us would do anything for them. We'd sit day after day **at their bedside** if they were sick. We'd search to the **ends of the world** if they were lost. We'd dry every tear and **hold them in our arms** for hours if they were sad. And our home would **always be their home**, no matter how far away they lived. The truth is,

loving a son or daughter is something that most parents have almost **no control over**. It's just **THAT** powerful.

Well, I'm here today to remind you that God loves you more.

Or maybe that person you love the most is a **parent**, someone who did so much for you over the years. Or a **brother or sister**, someone you shared a life with as a child and maybe even as an adult. Or a **friend**, that person you can tell anything to, that person who is always there for you no matter what, that person who knows you better than any other.

The truth is that God loves you more.

“So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

My dear friends, it's not always easy to truly believe that God loves us **more than we can imagine**, that we are priceless in his eyes. One reason, of course, that we often don't consider ourselves to be very **lovable**. We know our faults all too well. We know that we can be selfish. We know that we can be petty and vindictive. We know that we can be deceitful and hard-hearted and hot-headed and less-than-honorable in countless ways. In other words,

we're very much aware of our shortcomings. And when we think that way **about ourselves**, we can often wonder **why God would love us**.

After all, most of us **don't love that way at all**. Most of us struggle to love those who don't love us back, struggle to love those people we don't like, struggle to love those **who do little to show us that they've "earned" our love**. It's SO much easier to love those who can do something for us, love those whose company we cherish, love those who shower us with love.

Thank goodness God doesn't love us the way we often love in this world. Thank goodness God doesn't **put conditions** on his love. Thank goodness he doesn't wait to **see how we'll act** before deciding whether to love us or not. Thank goodness he doesn't use his love to manipulate us or dangle his love at the end of a string to **get us to behave in a certain way**. Thank goodness, no, thank God, that he loves us no matter what, no matter whether we **do the right thing or the wrong thing**, whether we love him back or run the other way. Thank God he doesn't use OUR love as a model for HIS. But maybe we can use his for ours.

The importance of believing in the "unbelievable" love of God might not be that obvious. But I can assure you,

believing that God truly loves us unconditionally, continually, relentlessly, profoundly is the **foundation for leading a good life**, a holy life, a life full of meaning and beauty and goodness and peace. You see, once we start to realize just how much God loves us, two things begin to happen.

One - living as God asks becomes a **whole lot easier** (and by “easier” I mean a lot more natural, more automatic, less burdensome). We know from experience **that loving those who show us love** is the easiest kind of love, the kind of love that **feels almost effortless**, the kind of love we can't wait to return. In other words, believing in God's deep love for us **helps us return that love willingly** and not begrudgingly, **generously** and not stingily, **continually** and not once in a while. If God loves us so much (and we believe it), it can make us want nothing else but to **show him love in return**.

And secondly - believing in God's incredible love for us, **in the face of our own faults, failings, weaknesses, and sin**, can help us love all those who we find difficult to love, help us to look past the faults and failings of others and **see the beautiful person that God sees**, a person who has **God's** unconditional love, and who, in turn, **deserves ours**. In other words, if God loves imperfect you and imperfect me, then maybe we can **see ourselves in**

others, and be willing to give them the same gift God **has given us** - love.

“So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

May the worth God **sees in us** challenge us to **see that same worth** in every person.

A Short Story

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him. Every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect himself from the elements, and to store his few possessions. One day after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, with smoke rolling up to the sky. He felt the worst had happened, and everything was lost. He was stunned with disbelief, grief, and anger. He cried out, 'God! How could you do this to me?' Early the next day, he was awakened by the sound of a ship approaching the island! It had come to rescue him! 'How did you know I was here?' asked the weary man of his rescuers. 'We saw your smoke signal,' they replied.

