

October 2023

Impact

Bring faith to life. Find life in faith.

THE BASICS.

Sometimes it is good for us to get back to basics. At home, we might set aside time for dinner and conversation rather than family members rushing off to separate activities. In our lives of faith, Jesus says we are called to two foundational actions: love God, love neighbor.

LOVE GOD.

Love God, love our neighbor. It sounds so simple. And yet, we know that it is anything but simple. Loving God and neighbor requires commitment. Loving God requires us to place our trust in One who cannot be seen and yet knows us better than we know ourselves. Loving God calls us to order our lives in relationship to God and God's ways, the way of self-giving love. When our heart is centered on God, we will see ourselves as uniquely created, God's very own. When we love God with all our soul, we find peace in the midst of turmoil. When our mind is focused through faith, we seek what is good, right, and just before all things.

LOVE NEIGHBOR.

Loving our neighbor is the way in which we show our love for God. When we love God with our whole being, we understand that our neighbor is a child of God, one who is God's prized possession, just as each of us is. The truth is that every person is created out of love, for love. As Christ himself taught us, whatever we do for the least among us, we do for him. Loving our neighbor is, after all, our greatest act of faith, of discipleship, and of stewardship.

TAKE THE CALL TO HEART.

What would our lives look like if we really took to heart the two intertwined commandments that Jesus places before us? Would we re-order our days in order to spend time with God in prayer? Would we become more attentive to the needs of others? Might we recognize our talents as gifts from God, and more readily give the gifts back, with increase, at home, in our parish, and the world? Would we consider that the way we spend time, money and attention are signs of our priorities?

IT'S TIME.

Most of us have thought about these things many times in the past, but may have done little to change our routines, behaviors or habits. One of the reasons the three-year Lectionary cycle of readings is so helpful is that we hear passages like this again and again. We hear and reflect on God's word in light of the very real circumstances of our lives. Think for just a moment about what was happening in your life three years ago. Surely you heard the Sunday readings differently then than you do now. The gospel passages we hear this month challenge us to not be passive recipients of God's gracious love. Let this be the year we take Jesus' two great commandments more fully to heart, and act accordingly: love God, love neighbor.

"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."

Bear
good fruit
that endures.

FINDING STRENGTH

"I can do all things in him who strengthens me."



Faith in Jesus does not prevent us from having difficulties in life. Truly, discipleship includes challenges - the ordinary adversities that are part of life, and particular trials that come from our commitment to living as Christian people in the world. As we listen to the gospels this month, Jesus challenges us to live as his people, stay focused on God and God's ways, and produce the fruit of faith through our actions.

"I can do all things in him who strengthens me." Such faith is not theoretical or abstract. When we can make this statement with conviction in the midst of turmoil, we tell ourselves and others that we believe Christ is with us, that the Lord cares about us and remains with us each and every day, even when we are not conscious of God's presence. As we face the trials of life and of discipleship, faith provides perspective. And strength. And hope. Because Jesus bore his cross and reigns victorious over it, we can face our trials with the assurance that Christ is with us and that nothing is greater than the love and power of God.

"I can do all things in him who strengthens me." St. Paul wrote those words to the Christian community in Philippi from prison. "I know how to live in humble circumstances; I also know how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I can do all things in him who strengthens me." Can we say the same? Do we trust in the Lord in every circumstance, in all things? Earlier in the same letter, St. Paul shared the faith that gave him courage in the trials that he faced, "Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your request known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Phl 4:6-9, 12-14)

"I can do all things in him who strengthens me." Notice that St. Paul's prayer is one of thanksgiving. Even in the midst of trial, doubt, or fear, we always have something to be thankful for, because we are blessed children of God!

"I can do all things in him who strengthens me." Let these words sink into our hearts and minds. Let them become a mantra, a phrase that we repeat whenever we are challenged - by situations at home or work, when things seem to be falling apart, when we are discerning a new step on life's path or need courage to take a stand or act as we know discipleship demands - in all things, let us trust that we are not alone. We can do these things in and with Christ.

Impact this month

Make your requests known to God. Find peace. Live faith.

Read St. Paul's words above slowly and prayerfully. Notice where your mind or heart gravitates.

How does this message touch your heart? How does it challenge you? How does it console you?

What prayers and petitions do you bring to the Lord at this time? What in your life needs the peace of God that surpasses all understanding? What have you learned about the Lord's way that you should keep on doing?

Turn to God in prayer this month. Rest in God's peace when you are tired, troubled, or stressed. Remind yourself that you can do all things in him who strengthens you.

