

HOMILY ~ 30th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME OCTOBER 28/29, 2023

*What the world needs now, is love sweet love.
It's the only thing, that there's just too little of.
What the world needs now, is love sweet love.
No not just for some, but for everyone.*

The world right now could use a lot more love, don't you agree? In the Gospel Reading today, Jesus gives us the new commandment, *Love God and Love you neighbor*. He further tells us, "*The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.*" Could he be any more clear? Today I want to talk about some things that tend to limit our ability to show loving kindness to one another. One of these things is the negativity bias. We tend to pay more attention to negative information than positive information, and we give more weight to negative experiences than positive experiences. The news media knows this so that is why the majority of news that is reported is negative, it gets our attention.

Right now, the top stories every time you turn on the news are the tragedy in the Middle East and the war in the Ukraine. This news is extremely upsetting; and when you hear or see it, your body reacts to it. You have an adrenaline rush that unconsciously triggers a fight, flight or freeze response. Now the negativity bias and the fight, flight or freeze mode is a good thing if there is a present danger to you. What is happening in the Middle East and the Ukraine is very serious and upsetting, but it does not pose an immediate danger to us. Being exposed to this news over and over again all day is going to make you very anxious and seeing pictures and videos is going to intensify your anxiety. Constantly watching the news on TV and on social media does not change the situation. It is just the same news all day, usually nothing new.

When we have the fight, flight, freeze response, we separate from people. If you fight, since there is no one right here that is responsible for what is happening, this leads to violent demonstrations or scapegoating groups of innocent people. If your response is flight, you isolate from most people. You cannot show loving kindness when you are in fight or flight mode. I have decided to limit my news to one hour on Public Radio, and I do not see any of those horrible pictures and videos. If you have young children, I would suggest that you get them off of the internet and social media where they will see these pictures. They see them and do not know what to do with that. As adults, we do not know what to do with that.

Just because your body reacts with fight, flight or freeze, does not mean we have to act on that. The first step to avoid this is to think and pray about it. What is the truth about what is going on, and what does love call us to do? While it appears that the whole world is at war, that is not true. Most of the world is at peace, which gives us hope that these situations can be resolved with God's help. There is an alternative way of handling these things. However, we are going to continue to have these problems until we realize that everyone matters, people of all nations, people of all ages, everybody matters, everybody. We need to pray for the people that can directly affect the situations and treat everyone with respect with acts of kindness. Kindness can start with you and me.

Another thing that is constantly on the news is our dysfunctional federal Congress. This can cause the fight, flight freeze response as well. It divides us into groups that fight with one another or avoid one another. No loving kindness there. What is the truth about what is going on? It may seem that our whole government is in shambles, but that is not true. Many things are getting accomplished at the state level. We may not like everything that is being done, but things are getting accomplished. Most of our government agencies are providing excellent and important services. I think overall our government is doing very well, which gives us hope that Congress may be able to work things out with God's help.

What does love call us to do? Pray for our legislators. When we vote, maybe we should look for people of integrity who can compromise and do the right thing rather than just focusing on what can get them re-elected and what is good for their party. Maybe we should stop demonizing people from other political parties and people we do not agree with. Maybe we should try to understand one another and treat everyone with loving kindness. I think that would go a long way. *Love God and love our neighbor. "The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."*

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim