

**+HEARTS THAT ARE JUST AND TRUE
Feb. 12, 2017**

6TH Sunday A,

Dear Sisters and Brothers: The opening prayer for today's Eucharist captures, I believe, what is most central in our readings and celebration. We ask to be taught that God abides in hearts that are just and true, that we may be so fashioned by grace as to become God's very own place of dwelling.

From Paul's letter to the Corinthians we have a clear description of what it means to be dwelling places of the divine presence. As it has been written he tells us: "What eye has not seen, and the ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit." It is a mysterious and hidden wisdom that has been given us.

Our first reading from Sirach about keeping the commandments of God and then our gospel from Matthew, simply draw out the implications of this life of the Spirit, this divine wisdom that has been revealed to us. As I reflected further on this hidden wisdom of God, it is more than just a coincidence that this Sunday falls right between the memorials of St Scholastica, our Lady of Lourdes and Valentine's Day that we will celebrate next Tuesday.

The focus of each of these celebrations is love both human and divine.

St Scholastica, as you may know was thought to be the twin sister of St Benedict whose Rule women and men have sought to live for centuries.

The great story that is told in the Life of Benedict by St Gregory the Great is that of St Benedict going to visit his sister for a day, shortly before she departed from this life. Scholastica begged Benedict to stay on since it was turning evening, that they might continue to discuss the joys of life in heaven. Benedict refused, saying that his monastic rule demanded that he return to his monastery. Scholastica

begins to pray and suddenly a thunderous downpour of rain erupts making it impossible for him to leave. "What have you done?" he asks her in alarm, to which she simply replied, "I asked you, but you were unwilling to listen to me, I asked my Lord and He listened to me." Her love meant far more to God than all Benedict's determination to keep his monastic rule.

Our Lady's appearance to Bernadette is no less moving in the delicacy with which Mary treats this humble girl of a very poor family, enkindling within the Church a great zeal for prayer and charity, especially service to the sick and poor. In another way this could also be said about Valentine's day, the way it seeks to address what takes place between friends, lovers in their search for what gives lasting joy.

Our gospel is not the easiest to read even when using the shorter form, because of the demands that Jesus seems to place on us. But as one ponders it, we begin to see just how central love is to our everyday Christian lives. Jesus is calling his disciples to live a life surpassing that being taught by the religious leaders of his time. They were telling their people not to kill but Jesus says that whoever is angry with sister or brother will be liable to judgment.

The longer text then says that. if a sister or brother has anything against you, you are to go and be reconciled before coming to offer a gift at the altar. God is interested not in our gifts but what is going on in our hearts as we offer them. Told not to commit adultery, Jesus tells us that to look at a man or woman with lust is already to commit adultery in the heart. Again, Jesus would have us to be aware of what is going on in our hearts as we live our lives whether as celibate or as married persons. By the Law we were warned not to make false oaths, but Jesus tells us not to swear at all; let our 'Yes' be 'Yes' and our 'No' be 'No.' Again, Jesus wants nothing more, nothing less than hearts to be "just and true" as prayed for in our opening prayer.

More could be said about our readings and let me admit that in my own pondering I began to have a dream. As this Sunday would have

us grow in awareness of God's unsurpassable love for us in Jesus, my dream is that this love is about to break down the dividing walls in this country and throughout the world. My dream is that the love of Jesus is about to undo all that separates men and women, so the gifts and dignity of every woman and man may be fully recognized and cherished.

My dream is that Jesus' love in our Church is now moving our hierarchy to be truly attentive to the pastoral needs of each of its members, especially the poor and neglected. My dream is that the love in Jesus is about to break down all dividing walls of racism, discrimination due to religion and economic status. I dream that members of our U.S. Congress will turn from party interests to the real interests of the people they serve.

I dream, finally, that what we celebrate at this altar is about to make each and all of us gathered here such vibrant members of Christ's Body that everyone with whom we live will know ever more of God's living and loving presence in our world.