

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes  
Santa Barbara, CA**

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – February 2, 2013

Mary Becker

Reflections on **Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19; 1 Cor 12:31-13:13; Luke 4:21-30**

**G**ary and I took classes on homiletics when we were in the Deacon Formation program of the Louisville Archdiocese. Our instructor was a Methodist minister who rode a motorcycle—who was also chair of the homiletics department at St. Meinrad, a Benedictine seminary. In our classes, he taught us that the homilist should *break open* the texts of the readings and relate them to our current lives. And – of the readings, the gospel is generally the one to be most emphasized.

So I read today's gospel. And the message that came through to me was "prophets never gain acceptance in their hometowns." Now - I agree that is generally true. Perhaps it was very important for the people of his time to hear. But – of all the things that Jesus said - I don't think this is his most profound teaching. Do you? So, I think I'll let go of breaking open today's gospel, if you don't mind.

On the other hand – the Second Reading today, from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians – is absolutely brilliant. His letter contains profound information – for us – in our present time. It gives us very specific guidance about the core value – the one single thing that is most essential - to being a Christian. That core value is – of course - Love. Love is the one, key, core, essential requirement of the Christian life.

Jesus emphasized love. He often spoke of love. He said: "Love God with your whole heart and soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself." He said: "Love

one another as I have loved you." He even said: "Love your enemies." But Jesus didn't go into great detail on how to actually do all this loving. Perhaps because he was such a spiritual master and so embodied love, it didn't occur to him to explain in detail to his disciples how they were to love. Or perhaps he did explain in detail, but his disciples just didn't get it, and so they didn't pass those specific teachings on.

Whatever – and however Jesus' teachings on love did or didn't happen – we are left with the very clear command to love – *everyone!* – but we don't have all the tools to do so. Throughout our whole lives we ask "What *is* this thing called love?" "How do we do it?"

We very much want to be loved, to have love and to give love – and we spend a lot of our time seeking love and trying to puzzle it all out. But so often true love seems to elude us. Fortunately, along came St. Paul, with his profound teaching on the details of what love looks and feels like – and how we are to do it.

I invite you to take just a minute to do a thought experiment. Please close your eyes, and imagine a person who is very close to you – someone that you do love – a child, a parent, a friend, a spouse. Hold that person in your heart as you listen to these words.

"Love is patient; Love is kind.

Love is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated.

Love is never rude or self-seeking.

It is not quick-tempered; it does not brood over injuries.

Love does not rejoice in what is wrong,  
but rejoices in the truth.  
Love bears all things, believes all things,  
hopes all things, endures all things.  
Love never fails.”

Gently let go the image of your loved one  
and open your eyes.

I don't remember if that passage was read  
at our wedding – it probably was. I do know  
that I've heard those words at many wed-  
dings over the years. When I was a young  
woman, I was puzzled – and kind of skeptic-  
al about the idea of love being patient – and  
kind – and enduring all things. That didn't  
sound so romantic to me. But with the per-  
spective that comes from many years of life,  
the real wisdom and truth of those qualities  
is becoming more and more clear to me.

Now – please bear with me for one more  
thought experiment. Again close your eyes,  
and imagine a person that you do not love.  
This might be a co-worker, a neighbor, a  
relative, just someone who just ‘gets on your  
last nerve.’ If there is someone like that in  
your life, hold him or her in your heart, and  
ponder how to love that person as you listen  
to these words.

“Love is patient; Love is kind.  
Love is not jealous, it is not pompous, it  
is not inflated.  
Love is never rude or self-seeking.  
It is not quick-tempered; it does not brood  
over injuries.  
Love does not rejoice in what is wrong,  
but rejoices in the truth.  
Love bears all things, believes all things,  
hopes all things, endures all things.  
Love never fails.”

As you gently let this person go, wish  
them well, and open your eyes.

Much of the time we are flawed, petty,  
impatient, quick to anger, demanding, want  
our own way, and take pleasure in an  
enemy's come-uppance. In short, we are  
human, and prone to all the things that love  
is not. And yet – for the sake of having  
love and giving love, we *can learn* to be  
patient, kind, trusting, hopeful, enduring,  
and all the rest – with our dear ones and with  
those not yet so dear to us.

To practice the qualities of love is to find  
the way that surpasses all the others. It is  
the Christian journey. It is the Way - the  
path of Jesus.