



The Word...

Brothers and sisters: Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt *compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.* And over all these *put on love*, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And *be thankful*. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. *And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*
(Col 3: 12-21)

Pondering the Word ...

Today is Holy Family Sunday, and there's probably no other Scripture passage that spells out more clearly what makes for a holy family, a holy community or nation, a holy world. We get distracted this time of year with the images of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, haloes glowing around their heads, and lose sight of what really makes them holy. It's not about sainthood or special graces or even being or living with the Savior. It's about love in all its manifestations: compassion, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, gratefulness.

Living with other people is hard, particularly if we have some idealized concept of what living compatibly is supposed to look like. Paul calls love, "the bond of perfection," but doesn't say anything about us being perfect—because we are not! Living in love, living as a holy family means we work, united together as one, through the good times, the difficulties, the joys and sorrows, and the blessings and the mistakes.

Our world is sorely in need of holiness right now. Not just piety and prayer in the confines of a sanctuary. We need holy people living and active in the streets, on the world stage, in nations, communities, and families. If we take Paul's advice and remember to say and do everything in the name of Jesus, we can begin to sow peace, holiness, and love. What a great gift that would be to ourselves, our families, the world, and to God!

Living the Word...

We are on the cusp of the New Year: time to look back and to plan ahead; to set some new goals perhaps, change some habits, eliminate some things weighing us down. What if your only resolution this year was to consciously put on love every morning? To be so aware that as you are pulling on your shirt sleeves or tying your shoes, you take a brief second to say, "I put on love today?" What might your day look like? Well, you might take better care of yourself. Maybe you'd find you're more grateful for the little things, perhaps more patient with both loved ones and strangers. You might even be willing to forgive a friend or to show compassion for someone you might have been judgmental of before. Imagine for a moment how that would feel—to let go of all that tension, anger, and bitterness..... Now go ahead, give it a try. See if you can do this throughout January and how you can change your life through love.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Jan 1: *“The LORD bless you and keep you! The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace!”*(Nm 6: 22-27)

This passage from Numbers appears in the lectionary every January 1, and for good reason. What a wonderful blessing God bestows on the Israelites! What a wonderful blessing for all of us as we begin the new calendar year! I offer just one additional thought: This year, allow yourself to accept the unconditional love of God’s. Open your eyes and see God’s face shining upon you. Open your heart and allow God to give you peace. God’s blessings are there for us always, but it’s up to us to accept them. Open yourself to God’s love every day. I wish you and your friends and families health and happiness in 2018!

Jan 2: *“Let what you heard from the beginning remain in you.”* (1 Jn 2:22-28)

There’s a lovely Jewish folktale that says when we are about to be born, the angels press our lips together to silence us so we don’t share the wonders of heaven when we arrive on earth. That’s why, the tale tells, when we are trying to recall something we often tap the little space between our lips and nose (called the philtrum, from the Greek, meaning “that which awakens love”). A beautiful image, and a meaningful one as well. John is cautioning the early Christians about those preaching false doctrines, which of course is important. But it’s also important to remember we are all made in the image of God. Despite the burden of original sin, we come to this earth with a sense of wonder, innate joy, and trust. Jesus tells us we must be like little children to enter the Kingdom of heaven. Let what you have heard from the angels—hope, joy, wonder—remain in you.

Jan 3: *“No one who remains in him sins; no one who sins has seen him or known him.”* (1 Jn 2:29-3:6)

John’s letters are filled with declarative statements like this that, if taken at face value, seem impossible to achieve. We are all sinners; in fact, to declare ourselves sinless is the most serious sin of all! Most of us fail every day without even batting an eye. And yet we *have* seen him, we *do* know him. He is the one who takes away our sins. To remain in Christ is to acknowledge our need for his mercy. Do not despair your sinfulness--it is what brings you to your knees. The more we seek forgiveness for our weakness, the stronger we become.

Jan 4: *“Come, and you will see.”* (Jn 1:35-42)

We live in a world of immediate gratification. We prefer to have things come to us. This is particularly prevalent among young people and can be a source of anxiety and depression. The things that give real meaning to our lives are those we are willing to seek. Jesus doesn’t require John’s disciples to jump through hoops or study long hours or go to a distant land. He invites them to look at his life. He doesn’t force them, but he doesn’t do all the work for them either. It is their choice. It is our choice. If you really want to see beyond the limits of yourself and your world, accept Jesus’ invitation: “Come, and you will see.”

Jan 5: *If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him? Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.* (1 Jn 3:11-21)

I know many people who struggle with how to show compassion to the needy sisters and brothers they encounter. They hesitate to give money because they are afraid they will be supporting a drug or alcohol habit, so instead they avert their eyes and hurry their pace or hope for the stoplight to change quickly. While we are not to judge what someone chooses to do with money we might give, we still might want to find other ways to show compassion. How about keeping a bag of socks and other seasonal supplies in your car? Some healthy snacks or juice boxes? Gift cards to local fast food places? If you are walking near a convenience store, offer to purchase some things for the person. Keep information handy about emergency support systems and shelters. And treat whomever you encounter with respect. Let them see the love of God shining through your eyes and in your smile. That may be the best gift they receive all day.

Jan 6: *And a voice came from the heavens, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”* (Mk 1: 7-11)

Spend time in prayer today imagining God saying this to you. “You are my beloved son, my beloved daughter. I look upon you and see that you are very good. I am well pleased.” If this is too hard for you, ask a trusted friend or minister to pray it with you. Allow yourself to look upon yourself as God does: with love.