

**Well, don't I look beauty in Pink? This wonderfully effeminate color other than making me look a little foo foo does have a purpose. It is a happy color to remind us that we have reached the midpoint of Lent. It is a happy color that ties in with today's readings, which have a theme of joy and of trust in the Lord. During the whole of Lent, our hearts are set on the joy of Easter, but our feet must be firmly planted in the repentance of Lent. This Sunday, the midpoint, invites us to look at the joy just a bit more closely so that we can be encouraged to embrace for the rest of Lent the repentance which is so necessary to make a true difference in our lives.**

**Today's Gospel presents us with the foundational truth that underlies our faith. It speaks of a sacrificial love. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. I think if we really allowed this love to penetrate our lives, it would change everything. It would transform us completely.**

**As a celibate I get a glimpse of this love as I have sacrificed the joy of having a family in order to make God's love a greater reality in our world. Yet, I know that I am pretty much an amateur when it comes to sacrificial love. Those of you who are parents have a much deeper sense of it than I ever will. What you are willing to do for the love of your children humbles me. The crosses that you take up for love of your children astound me. And sadly I believe the greatest cross for any parent to bear, would be to bury a child. In my ministry I have walked with all too many parents down that terrible path. So often parents have turned to me at such times and said, "Father, if only it had been me." That is sacrificial love. It is the love that our God has for us.**

**On Wednesday night Fr. Charlie gave a talk to the Sera Club that blew me away. I wish it had been recorded because I know my paraphrasing of it will not do it justice. He talked**

about the perfect love that our perfect God has for us. And yet because we are human it is almost impossible for us to understand his total, unconditional love for us. So, the Lord of the Universe who created all things became one of us, became a creature so that we might understand the depth of his love. Fr. Charlie said that there can be no suffering in God because God is perfect. Only by becoming human could God show us a sacrificial love. God became man and as man suffered and died for love of us. It is astounding. God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. There is the gospel in a nutshell. God loves the whole world more than we can imagine.

No wonder this is the world's most popular Bible verse, because it is, indeed, good news, even the best news. But first it's hard. It is hard because we are not in control. Hard because every time we hear how much God loves us we also know that we had nothing to do with it, cannot influence it, and therefore are out control. And, sometimes, that can make us afraid.

God's unconditional, uncontrollable love can frighten us. John says as much in today's reading: "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed." Desiring to maintain some semblance of control at any cost, we sometimes run from the light, fleeing God's loving embrace, only to find ourselves trapped in the darkness of our own devices.

But then along comes life, or God, or destiny, or tragedy, or whatever you want to call it, something that shakes us up, presents something utterly beyond our ability to cope, and drives us to our knees in despair—you know, like the end of an important relationship, or the death of a loved one, or the return of illness, or the loss of a job— and you realize in a flash of painful insight that you never were in control. Not of your

life, not of circumstances or fate, and certainly not of God. And all of a sudden this difficult, disturbing, hard message about God's grace becomes the best news you can imagine. Because here's the thing: precisely because we are *not* in control of God and therefore not in control of our relationship with God, we realize that it is the one relationship we can't blow, the one relationship that we can't screw up. God has taken responsibility for this one. And God has promised to bring it to a good end.

This is why I think John 3:16 is so difficult, so hard...and at the same time so desperately hopeful and life-giving. This good news promises that God will never let us go, that God will not take "no" for an answer, that God will pursue us like the intrepid hound of heaven until we are God's own.

Does that mean that we have nothing to do, nothing to contribute to this most important relationship? Definitely not! Once we have been loved this fully, this completely, we can respond in love, honoring God and sharing the news of God's love for the world with all we meet. Further, we can love each other, throwing ourselves into struggles and celebrations all around us, always working for the good of our neighbor and the world, propelled forward by the knowledge that God loves us and this world so very much. So, there's plenty to do. But we do it all knowing that we are messengers, witnesses to what God has done for us, not managers.

So hear both the judgment and promise of this passage once again. You are not in control—of this world or even your life, not really. But the God who created the vast cosmos will hold onto you amid the chaos, love you even when you feel most unlovable, and bring you to eternal life. This is why I'm dressed in pink today. This is what St. John wrote. This is what Jesus' cross and resurrection guarantees. "For God so loved the world

**that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." Amen! Amen!**