

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Luke 13:34

In the reading from St Luke's Gospel for today, we witness the pain of rejected love in Jesus' heart. Jesus isn't only talking about the people of His time rejecting the love He has for them, but He is also recalling the long history of people rejecting the love of God. In love, God sent messengers, prophets, even angels, to tell His people how much He loved them. They all had the same message, 'Turn your hearts back to God'. Each messenger, and the One who sent them, was rejected. The more God spoke, the more people turned a deaf ear. Jesus expresses the broken heart of God with His lament over Jerusalem. We can only guess at the pain that God must have felt in His heart? We can probably compare it to the pain that parents experience who constantly reach out and try to express how much they love their child, showing understanding and demonstrating the kind of love that only a parent can have for a child, only to have their love rejected. The parents grieve as their child ends up in all kinds of trouble simply because the guidance offered in love has been ignored.

God's children have rejected His love in the past, but that doesn't stop God from continuing to love His creation. It lead Him to do what was so risky and dangerous by sending His Son, the ultimate gift of love, to once again show His rebellious children how much He loved them. However, just like the prophets of old, Jesus is rejected, ridiculed, beaten and nailed to

cross to die.

The greater the love, the greater the pain of the rejection. The Bible says that the greatest love a person can have is the kind that is willing to die for ones friends. We are told that God's love for the world is so great that He sent His only Son to rescue His people from death, and give them eternal life.

The love that God has for us is immeasurable, and greater than any love we can imagine. So, with such a great love as this, imagine the pain within the heart of God when his people reject Him.

God is never far away, and we can feel safe knowing that His love and power are close by, even in the middle of difficult times. He is always calling us to come closer, to feel the warmth of His love, to follow a way of life that is healthy and safe, to be the people He intended us to be. His protection from all that would harm us is certain; we are even protected from the effects of sin and death in our lives. Even when we are at our lowest, we know that we can endure all things through the strength that comes only from God. He is saying, "I love you so much; I want to help you; I want to put my arms around you and keep you safe; I want to do so much for you and you will not let me". There is a story about a family whose twenty-year-old son had rebelled against the values he had been taught as a child, who sank into a life of drinking and drugs. One night, in a drunken stupor, he appeared at his parent's home, stumbled through the door and passed out on their floor. As the father was about to wake him and kick him out, the mother gently knelt down beside him, placed his head in her lap and caressed his hair. When the father began to speak, she said, "Shhhh! This is the only time I get to hold him. He's still my son. I want to hold him."

The love this mother had for her son, is the same love that God has for us. No matter how bad we've been, no matter how unfaithful we've been, God still loves us. We are still his children, no matter how rebellious we might be. He still longs for the day when his children will see just how much he loves each of them.

During Lent, we are urged to take a long look at our relationship with God, at just how much God loves us, and keeps on loving us, even though we disappoint Him so often. He has sent us His Son, and yet we find ourselves still acting as if God's love doesn't count at all. I wonder how often Jesus says about us, "I want to put my arms around you and you won't let me".

How often does Jesus weep when He sees us hurting, struggling, carrying enormous burdens, all the while forgetting that He is close by, ready to carry our burdens for us because He loves us so much? But, what do we do? We want to be in control. We want to work things out for ourselves. It must really hurt God to see us struggle in this way, when there is so much He can do to help us.

Also, how often does Jesus weep over us when He sees us clinging to our sinful ways, when we know all too well, that is not what God wants. There are those temptations and habits that are so hard to let go, and we really struggle with them. In the end, we feel so guilty that, once again, we have said cruel words and done unkind things. As Jesus sees us struggle with our sin He must say, "If only you would trust me and let me put my arms around you things would be so different".

Jesus still weeps over His church just as much as He wept over the people of Israel, when He sees how wrong we get things in the church. We get things so out of focus that we no longer see that God and His love for us, and for all people, is what we are

supposed to be about. We argue, put others down, we want our own way, we don't care about the feelings of others, forgetting that we are 'citizens of heaven', to use Paul's words in the Philippians reading. As Jesus observes His church, He must say, "I want to put my arms around you, and guide you with my Holy Spirit, but you won't let me".

Jesus is saddened by the rejection of God's love for His people, because this rejection leads to the judgement of God on those who refuse His love. But there is also hope, a promise, in Jesus' words. He keeps on calling us, sheltering us under His protective care, ensuring that we have the strength to deal with whatever comes our way, because His love for us goes on forever. Whatever we are facing in our lives at this moment, He invites us to allow Him to put His arms around us.

AMEN.