

5th Sunday 2011

Fr. Bob VerEecke, S.J.

Stand up and tell me if you love my Jesus
Stand up and tell me if you love my Lord
I want to know if you love my Jesus
I want to know if you love my Lord.

This is one of the choruses that parishioners of St. Anne's in Jamaica will most likely be singing this morning. Every Sunday after the gospel the people sing choruses of praise, expressing their powerful faith in God and the love they have for Jesus.

Although our parish trip to Jamaica was two weeks ago, I can't get it out of my mind, and not because of the 80 degree temperatures. It's because the profession of faith in Jesus Christ is so passionate and palpable. The name of Jesus is always on the lips of the people. And yet, this is not just an evangelical Jesus is my personal savior. It's something more. Jesus is the one, the human face of God who really does live with the poor, who struggles with them against the powers of death. In the neighborhood where St Anne's is, the biggest business is funeral parlors. They're everywhere you look. Coffins, hearses. Death is all around. But Jesus is the One who gives Life against all odds. Jesus is the one who has conquered sin and death, despite all the signs to the contrary for those who live in tin roofed shacks with dirt floors and who come to church alive in faith even though they have so little. Blessed are the poor in spirit, as we heard last week.

So, if I asked the congregation of St Anne's, "Do you love Jesus?" there would be a rousing, "Amen!" And if I asked the congregation of St. Ignatius in Chestnut Hill, "Do you love Jesus?" there would be a, "Of course. We wouldn't be here if we didn't. We just like to keep it to ourselves."

The reason why I'm asking the question, "Do you love Jesus? Do you love the one who is the human face of God?" is because I'm wondering if that is really what makes us Christian. If that is what gives us the name disciples: our love for Jesus.

Sometimes we hear people say, "he" or "she" is very Christian. What they mean is that that person is kind, compassionate, self-giving. But listen to the

prophet Isaiah, the Jewish prophet: feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, remove oppression from your midst. Then will your light shine. The moral imperative of being good and selfless is not uniquely Christian. It is found in all the great religious traditions. And not just religious traditions. You don't have to have a creed or belief in God to live morally and justly.

At the heart of being Christian is a passionate love for Jesus Christ. It is that passion that we hear in the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: "For when I was with you I was resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified." For in this Jesus is the revelation of the power of God.

Being Christian in its essence is loving God in and through the flesh and blood person Jesus the Christ. And if we say we love Jesus, then we are saying we love ourselves. We embrace our own humanity. We love and accept ourselves as God loves and accepts us. Can we really say that we love God, that we love Jesus if we hate ourselves, if we devalue who we are in God's eyes?

Jesus tells his disciples... No! He does more than tell. Jesus gives his disciples a "pep talk." He's encouraging them to believe in themselves. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. If you lose a sense of yourself, you lose everything. Don't hide your light.

To profess our love for God in Jesus Christ, we are not only called to love ourselves but to love and embrace the humanity of others. That's where we put into action the call to self-less love. It is not enough to simply say we love God. Love shows itself in actions. But the love of Christ must compel us to be the salt of the earth and light for the World.

So stand up and tell me if you love my Jesus! It may sound superficial, overly emotional. Today it's just meant to be a reminder. But it's really the heart of Gospel so let's sing again:

Stand up and tell me if you love my Jesus
Stand up and tell me if you love my Lord
I want to know if you love my Jesus
I want to know if you love my Lord.