

Reflection for Sunday 21B, 22nd August 2021

It has been good to see children and young people return to school this week, albeit with several restrictions that are still in place. There have been a lot of happy faces with many of the children and young people content to meet up with their friends in person rather than online. It is a new beginning, a new term and a fresh start. A new beginning or a fresh start often gives us a new sense of life and of purpose, perhaps even a renewed energy. As we emerge from the pandemic the Church, both local and universal, is looking to discover these qualities. It's a chance to meet and encounter family and friends after the summer holidays. We have all realized that meeting people is good for us and that during the pandemic when it was not possible, and it proved difficult. Hopefully, we are beginning to see positive signs that we can meet in a bigger crowd and a little more often.

This is just as true about our lives as it is for our lives of faith. Many people of faith have experienced an emptiness too in their lives. They have felt the pain of that loss or absence. Therefore, it is good to get back together again. Being connected is important for us in our daily lives and in our lives of faith. They walk together and can enhance each other and can lead to a life-giving place if the encounter is credible and life-giving. People of faith need energy because a tired and exhausted faith tends to have little life and lacks a coherent vision. The place of encounter that faith dares to seek is a sacred space, call it a "sanctuary" in which God's light dares to dwell. God's love speaks of light, friendship and faith which can all lead us to the crossroads where the encounter with God can prove uplifting. Perhaps, these words of John P. Lozano, a permanent Deacon, might help us get to the crossroads so that we can encounter God.

"Falling in love with God and experiencing a personal encounter with Jesus Christ happens first and foremost because God in Jesus through the Holy Spirit loves us and pursues us with his love. We know this because God "sent" his Son to be one of us: "I have come to seek out and save the lost." (Luke 19:10) God in Jesus came to humanity to love us and save us from sin and death. The initiative is with God, not with us. It is the same in our personal lives. God knows each of us by name. He has numbered the hairs on our head, and God is pursuing us as a lover toward the beloved. This is a most important reflection and starting point for us who desire to grow in this intimate love of God in our personal lives. Seeing God in this way creates a disposition of openness and receptivity, not of frantic search and anxiety over the outcome. Mary is the model disciple in the Bible and her words are most illustrative here: "Let it be done to me." In other words, let it come. Let love love. Let me receive you into my heart and mind, my soul, my body. This disposition of yielding in prayer and in our life is most central and necessary for us to experience the love of God and to encounter Jesus personally in our life.

At the same time, we are created with human freedom, the freedom to accept or reject this love. This leaves us with a mystery of the interplay of grace and human freedom, and we can only wonder why some of us know God's intimate love, while others do not. We often assume that a person has faith and another doesn't because of the influences on their life and upbringing. We think that someone has faith because they had good parents and a family that lived their faith, inspirational teachers along the way, or a solid Catholic Education. While all of these are potentially sources of faith, we also know many people who have had their benefits and do not have faith. I often feel a sense of awe and am deeply moved when I consider why I have faith, because in the final analysis, I do not have a rational answer. I can only be in awe of the mystery of God's merciful love for me. It is like the seed that grows by itself into a plant. Even the best gardener in the world still cannot convert the seed into a plant. She or he can only create conducive conditions for this "miracle" to happen."