

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I want to wish all fathers a very happy and blessed Fathers' Day!

In homilies, I have often suggested that the best test of love and friendship is that lovers and friends consistently call forth the best in each other. In other words, love is empowering. The difference between human love and God's love is that human love calls forth the best in us from outside ourselves. God's love calls forth the best in us from within ourselves.

Today's readings are all about God calling forth the best in us. In today's first reading, God promised the Israelites that if they listened to his voice and kept his covenant, they would be his special possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. However, we need to understand this reading in the context of Deuteronomy: *"It was not because you are the largest of all nations that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you, for you are really the smallest of all nations. It was because the LORD loved you..... [7:7-8a].* God's love empowered Israel to become a great nation.

In today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans, we are told that *"God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."* Because Christ died for us, we have been reconciled with God and with others. Implicit in this love is the call to live that reconciliation and to become reconcilers. Christ's death calls and empowers us to live in peace and harmony with others and calls and empowers us to become peacemakers and reconcilers. Since Jesus was the ultimate peacemaker and reconciler, we are our best selves when we are peacemakers and reconcilers.

In today's Gospel, from his many disciples, Jesus called the twelve apostles, *"gave them authority over unclean spirits,"* and sent them out, *"As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons.'"* It is significant that Matthew lists the twelve apostles by name. This suggests that God loves each of us personally and individually and calls each of us by name to play a unique role in his plan of salvation. What God calls and empowers us to do is shaped by the unique persons we are: our personality, our gifts, our talents, our character, our interests, our relationships. Like the apostles, we are to call forth the best in all those whose lives we touch.

It is the role of fathers and mothers to call forth the best in their children by loving them. Psychologist Joe Mazzei once said that it is important that children not only know that they are loved by their parents but also feel loved by their parents. Parents need to tell their children they love them. Parents need to affirm their children but also to set limits for their children. Parents need to be the first teachers of their children both by word and example. *"Children learn what they live and live what they learn."*

My brothers and sisters, the final verse of today's Gospel is sometimes translated *"The gift you have received, give as a gift."* Heart speaks to heart, and love calls forth love. Just as God and others have called forth the best in us by loving us, we are called to call forth the best in others by loving them, especially children. As Sandi Patti sang, *"And the Gift Goes On."*