

[Readings: Exodus 34: 4b-6, 8-9; Daniel 3:52-55; 2 Cor. 13:11-13; John 3:16-18]

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” Have you ever stopped to think about what the words of this greeting really means? If you have, then you have a grasp of today’s Solemn Feast of the Holy Trinity.

The “grace” of our Lord Jesus Christ. It’s been said that large people like me have “grace” when they dance. Quite frankly, I think it’s been a while since I’ve danced -- alone or with others! But “grace” doesn’t mean agility or ability. “Grace” comes from the Greek word, “charis” which really means “gift.”

The “gift” of our Lord Jesus Christ is what we NEED to get to Heaven, and I dare say, what we WANT to make our lives have purpose. Think about it. Jesus said, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” I think that makes it quite clear that consciously, subconsciously, or unconsciously, we really, really do NEED Jesus Christ in order to experience repentance, forgiveness, salvation, joy and lasting peace.

And isn’t that “gift” of our Lord Jesus Christ also what we really, really WANT? Dorothy Day, the cofounder of the Catholic Worker movement, once wrote: “We have all known the long loneliness. And we know that the answer is love, love in community.” We look for love in all the wrong places, when it is here, in this holy place; when it is here, in our hearts, the whole time.

The “love” of God... There is only one word for love in English; there are at least three words for love in Greek. There is Philos, the love that brothers and sisters share. There is Eros, the love that only a husband and wife are supposed to share. Then there is Agape. It’s hard to describe Agape, other than to say that it is the complete and unconditional love and faithfulness that God shows us as God’s favorite creation. We hear in our First Reading God’s description of Himself: “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” Complete and unconditional love and faithfulness. You and I are incapable of such perfect love. But we do catch glimpses of it from time to time.

But again, that love is available to each of us. From God Himself.

Finally, “fellowship” or “communion.” What does it take to build a community?

Look at your own household. Who's in charge? What is the quality of the relationships under your home roof? Can one easily see the fruits of the Holy Spirit when they step into your home: gentleness, peacefulness, joy, holiness, modesty, self-control?

A good experience of a family gathering "breathes life" into the family, whether that is through affection and song, or debating and laughing together. The Holy Spirit is that Divine Breath that keeps relationships alive.

What is true fellowship or communion? It's when we see in ourselves and thus are able to see in one another the very presence of God. And when we discover that the fellowship of God, the communion of God, the Holy Trinity of God, is with us and within us. When we reflect what we are inside, the image and likeness of God, it's easy to share in their fellowship and community.

That is what we have here at St. Martin de Porres Parish. The fellowship of God, the community of God is alive and thriving here at St. Martin's. And that is why so many of you come here week after week. We have a great product here. We just need more creative people to help "hype" the message "our there!"

In the movie, "Bruce Almighty," Bruce (Jim Carrey) asks God, "How do you make someone love you without affecting free will?" And God (Morgan Freeman) answers, "Welcome to my world, son. When you get that one figured out, let me know." Here are some starters, courtesy of St. Paul in our Second Reading: "Mend your ways. Encourage one another. Agree with one another. Live in peace."

From today's Gospel: "God so loved the world, that he gave us His only Son." I wish that sentence was not in the past tense, as something done, completed and over. I wish it could say, "God so LOVES the world, that God GIVES us the Son and their Spirit." God still loves. God still gives. God gives in His Holy Word. God gives in this Eucharist! God gives in the ministry, service and action we provide for our families, our community, our world. We can continue, and thus eventually become that giving, "Triune" action of God today. We could love the world so much, that we could give the world our very selves, so that everyone who believes in the message we bring -- about the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit -- "might not perish but might have eternal life." (Conclude with the Glory Be...)

ADDITIONAL PAGES FOR SR. NOREEN O'CONNELL'S 70<sup>TH</sup> JUBILEE MASS at 2 PM

And now a few words about our guest of honor, Sr. Noreen O'Connell, O.P. I did ask her to provide me with some background material about her life, her ministry, her family and friends. She presented me with no less than a dozen pages of fascinating, inspiring and sometimes funny memories. They all boiled down to the three most important gifts in her life as a woman religious: faith, family and friends.

As I get closer to religious women through friendship, I discover how full their lives, their education and their experiences are. In reading Sr. Noreen's bio, she echoes similar sentiments as other religious women of her time and of her age. To enter the convent in one type of Church, to be challenged to find one's identity and one's place in a Church that was going through the transition of the Second Vatican Council, and to be so humble and open to the Holy Spirit that one's whole life journey becomes an adventure, and ministry becomes a winding road as educator, principal, parish minister, pastoral associate and advocate for applicants of the Church annulment process.

She writes, "In 1967, I was made principal of St. Gabriel High School and Superior of St. Gabriel Convent. This was a time when "the Changes" were just beginning, so I knew my position as superior was one of transition. These were traumatic times for sisters, young and old. One day I would be trying to persuade an older sister to go into a modified habit, while another day I would be telling a younger sister to stop going bike riding with the young priest of the parish. Economic challenges were against the parish and the struggling high school. Eventually, the high school closed, the older nun went into the modified habit, the younger nun married the young priest, and I survived the whole experience."

The second twenty-five years of Sr. Noreen's religious life would become a time of social and political awareness. She made three trips to El Salvador following the murder of three nuns and a lay woman. The abject poverty, the utter destruction following an earthquake and the realization that our government was supporting the killing and disappearance of people made Sr. Noreen an active protester and letter-writer against war, nuclear weapons, unjust government policies and the illegal seizure of land or water by larger business corporations.

Her brother used to say, “I’m afraid to watch the news on television for fear I’ll see Noreen climbing some fence and being arrested for protesting something!”

I have been privileged to have shared Sr. Noreen’s confidence over the past three years here at St. Martin de Porres, and am blessed and proud to call her, friend.

She attributes her perseverance to a regular prayer life and the support from community living. Private and communal prayer and shared experiences can never be underestimated.

Thank you, Sr. Noreen, for your saying “yes” to the Lord, for saying “yes” to your faith, and for being a mentor and an example for your family and friends.

God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son. God so loved the world, that He gave us Noreen O’Connell. We gather around this Eucharistic Table to say “thanks” for the gift of our vocations, the gift of the sacramental life in the Church, and the gift of one another. AMEN!