

**Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis**  
**Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Feb. 2-3, 2019, Cycle C**

Sister Mary M. McClone, a scholar and a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph, is fluent in Spanish. She says a number of years ago she was invited to translate for an American diocesan delegation visiting their sister diocese in Bolivia. At one point she was assigned to help a reporter interview members of a Bolivian youth group about their future hopes and plans.

She said after the interview was finished, Kevin, the reporter, said to her, "I have never heard anything like this!" Perplexed, sister asked what he was talking about. Kevin said, "I kept asking these kids what they wanted to do in the future, and each one started out saying something like, 'My people need health care, so I want to be a doctor.' Or, 'My people need education, so I want to prepare to teach in the university.'" Kevin said, "I have never heard college students in the United States explain their plans in relation to the needs of our people."

As I thought about Sister Mary's account of how these Bolivian young people expressed their hopes for the future, (in terms of serving the needs of their people) I wondered if their sentiments were not a good example of living out the kind of love that St. Paul talks about this weekend in our passage from First Corinthians. St. Paul says, "Love...does not seek its own interests," implying that love like Christ's love seeks the interest of others, as our Bolivian young people were seeking to do. St. Paul says further: "If I do not have love I am a resounding or a clanging cymbal. If I do not have love, I am nothing" If I "do not have love, I gain nothing." "Love never fails." "...faith, hope and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

What does St. Paul mean that love never fails? We know all too well from our own daily lives that human love can fail all too easily. Our "loves" can be so disordered, and disintegrated all too easily; for our loves can be built upon our own misguided hopes and desires. However, Paul is speaking about a Love that has God as its origin. Love never fails because God who is love, never fails. The Greek word that Paul employs for this divine love is *agape*, meaning sacrificial, unconditional, and universal love. A love that is revealed not only in attitude but in action for the others.

A good example of the failure of disordered human love is given in our Gospel story this weekend. When Jesus spoke in his hometown of Nazareth's Synagogue, we are told "all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth." But Jesus' fellow townfolks' tune soon changes and they become enraged with him, ready to throw him over the brow of the hull. Why? Because Jesus reveals to them the true depths, the true nature of God's love; just how universal God's love is.

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Jesus speaks of God's healing love among the Gentiles when he talks about the Prophet Elijah being sent to the starving widow of Zarephath, but not to starving widows of Israel; and when He talks about Elisha the Prophet healing the leper Naaman, the Syrian, but not healing the lepers of Israel. Jesus was not saying that God is rejecting Israel, but that God's love is unconditional and God offers His healing and salvation to all peoples in need. Jesus' talk was too much for his fellow townsfolk of Nazareth to take. The Agape' love of God points to the inherent and true value of all human life. The anger at the Nazareth Synagogue emerged from a very narrow, human concept of love, leading those people to mistaken notions of how God should or must act. But God's love, the love that never fails, is not dependent upon human calculations of who is worthy or not worthy of love.

We must be careful not to take a holier-than-thou attitude toward Jesus' townsfolk, thinking that we who are followers of Jesus will not or cannot fall into the same trap of narrowly defining how we, and thus God, must love. For, our all too sinful history of the church proves otherwise. The rejection of the little ones of our society – whether the unborn, the aged, the disabled, the poor, the alien – emerges from our assessment that some human life is not worthy of love. Thus we find ourselves living an all too faulty and narrow love that will fail, instead of living the Agape' Love of God which never fails!