

**HOMILY**  
***Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time***  
***January 29-30, 2022***

Pastor Wilson had a church in the inner city of New York in a really rough neighborhood. A Puerto Rican woman, who did not speak English, came to him one day and told him that she wanted to do something to help with church ministry. He asked her what her talents were, and the only thing she could come up with is that she loved children. He put her on a church bus that went into the neighborhoods and brought children to Sunday school. She performed her duties every week. She would find the worst looking kid on the bus, put him or her on her lap and whisper over and over the only words she knew in English: "I love you. Jesus loves you." After several months, she became very attached to one boy who did not speak but came to Sunday school every week with his sister. Each week, all the way to Sunday school and all the way home, she would tell him: "I love you. Jesus loves you." One day, to her amazement, the little boy turned around and said: "I love you, too!" Then he put his arms around her and gave her a big hug. That was 2:30 on a Sunday afternoon. At 6:30 that night, he was found dead. His own mother had beaten him to death and thrown his body in the trash. I was both stunned and touched by that story. Stunned that a mother could do that and touched by the power of the Puerto Rican woman's love. The young boy knew in his short life that he was loved.

The Second Reading today is all about love. This is the reading that many engaged couples pick for one of the readings at their wedding. It is very appropriate to apply this reading to the love between married couples; but if you read what precedes this reading in the letter, it is intended to relate to the love between church members. So let's talk about love between church members. Look at the congregation, and look for the people who need to be loved. I think we need to seek the people who need our love. This is a little bit different way of thinking about who we are to love. The Puerto Rican woman understood that. She picked that young boy not because he sought her out, not because he was the cutest kid, not because he was the most fun or the easiest to love. But he was definitely the one that needed her love the most.

I also think that we need to be generous in giving our love away. Sometimes we withhold our love out of fear of being vulnerable, fear of being rejected or fear that our love will not be returned. Sometimes we use our love in an attempt to control others. I will love you when you do what I want you to do. We need to give love away

like a free gift. When we love, we need to be open to loving the people around us. In the Gospel Reading, the people tried to assassinate Jesus on the first day of his public ministry. They were so involved with their own needs and interests that they could not even consider seeing Jesus for who he was. Talk about a missed opportunity to love.

When we look at how we are to love, I think we need to look at our gifts, talents and charisms. We were given charisms by the Holy Spirit, and we are to use them to help other people. Sometimes we tend to underestimate the importance of our charisms. The Puerto Rican woman's charism was that she knew how to love children. Would you think of this as a charism? I think that was a gift from the Holy Spirit. It changed that little boy's life. Look at the things that you do well, the things you like and the things that people seek in you, even if you think they are no big deal. Sometimes other people recognize our charisms before we do. And sometimes we do not identify our charisms until later in life. One of my charisms is music, and I never thought of it as a charism until I was ordained and could use it to help others in my ministry. Also, remember that if you do not use your charisms to help others, they will go away. Use it or lose it. If we try to use our charisms for selfish or self-serving reasons, they will disappear. Gifts and charisms practiced without love are nothing. They will fail.

The greatest spiritual gift that we can give or get is love. Love is an end in itself. We may think our career, our house, our portfolio are important; but they are not as important as love. That little boy knew in his short life that he was loved by the Puerto Rican woman and by Jesus. That made all the difference in his life. As we hear in the Second Reading: "So faith, hope, love remain, these three, but the greatest of these is love." All of our stuff is going to stay here. It is the love that we get to take with us into eternal life.

***Love is eternal.  
Love never dies.***

Love & Peace,  
Fr. Jim