

Dearly Beloved,

“I do not know the man”. That was the response of Peter to the person who accused him of being associated with Jesus. It’s called Peter’s Denial in order to save himself from the same fate awaiting Jesus, which is only partially true. I think it was also a very true admission. Neither Peter, nor the other disciples who had been with Jesus 24/7 for the better part of 3 years knew him. How could it be that after all that time of being together, hearing him speak, watching his actions none of them really knew him? Jesus was very open and honest with them.

How can it be that people choose to marry, some stay married for years, and still do not really know each other? How can it be that people can attend church together for years and not know each other? Sometimes it’s because we’re afraid to be honest with each other. Afraid that if the other person really knew all the truth about me they would reject me. Of course, that is possible.

When it comes to knowing someone else, I doubt that any of us knows ourselves as well as God knows us. That’s the beauty and power of our first prayer of the Holy Eucharist. “Almighty God unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid.....”. God knows us better than we know ourselves, especially all our thoughts spoken, or not, all our actions and our failure to act and he loves each of us unconditionally forever. He will never disown you, or forsake you. That’s a good place to start by listening to what he has to say to you about you and his desire for you.

LISTENING. Maybe not knowing who we are, who God longs to help us become is because we don’t listen. Since it is God who decided that you and I and all other human beings and all living things would exist and live and thrive we cannot possibly know who we are to become, what kind of person we are to be since neither you or I initiated our existence. We usually try to make our way in this life on assumptions and from a whole lot of sources other than God. That is probably what has gotten the human family where we are today and while that isn’t all dark it is a nightmare instead of God’s Dream for us. What we presently have today is a far cry from God’s Kingdom here on this earth. That is what he has taught us to pray and work for, with him, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”.

LISTENING. That is where his life for us begins. Peter and all the others didn’t really listen to him. They didn’t listen to him without their assumptions, their preconceived notions, their fears, their prejudices, their filters that deafened and blinded them from their truth and the truth with them. I wonder how well you and I listen to others if we have similar filters compromising our ability to know another person especially if they are very different from us. If their difference is their race, the color and length of their hair, their accent, their politics, their religion, their position on hot button issues, a different point of view on finances, what color to paint the walls, what to do with Confederate monuments, etc., how can we know each other, how can we let our differences work for us, rather than against us and the possibility of the Kingdom of God, the Peaceful Kingdom of justice and hope for all become a reality for all on this earth?

There are matters that people refuse to discuss because it usually escalates into bitterness, high blood pressure, divorce of friendships, marriages, anger, and sometimes violence in the

words used, or actions taken. There is a better way, “a more excellent way”, St. Paul has said. It begins with listening FIRST to what God has to say about both of you because to God you are both his beloved children, loved at great and painful expense to God. Listening to the other won't cost you anything. Listening to learn how they came to see so differently from you, if they and you are willing to share your stories can lead to a perspective neither of you thought about because of your filters.

With the uprising over the death of George Floyd, I decided that it was time, maybe past time, to call the person I sat next to at a Pensacola Ministerial lunch meeting many months ago and ask him to join me for lunch. He is an Administrator on our mayor's staff. He is black. At the time of our meeting we gave our cards to each other and said we'd get in touch. I asked him to meet me for lunch and this afternoon we will do that. I said I am open to talk about anything, but want us to begin to know each other by sharing whatever we want each to know of who we are and by listening, just listening to each other. Our difference at this moment is our race, that's obvious. There may be other differences from very different life experiences, but I'm asking God to help me listen with a non judgmental, non defensive spirit, with God's Spirit in me and to share myself in the same way.

What will come of this? I don't know, but I intend to make the same offer to others with whom I differ in similar, or other ways. The way it is today, with so little listening to God and to each other in his Spirit and his Love for each of us, is obviously not leading us to respect and care for each other. If you are already living the way of listening, which I believe is God's Way of Love, please share with me what that's like for you. If you are not yet dealing with others with whom you differ in the way of listening, but are willing to try it for awhile, please let me know so I can pray for you.

Bless be the tie that binds our hearts in mutual love.

In Christ's Love, Fr. Bob