

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME–20214

For Father's Nicholas's 75th birthday, the congregation at St Mary's, Newark, England, decided to give him a present of a new suit. The one he was wearing looked as old as he did. Father Nicholas was so moved by the gift that he wore it the following Sunday at a gathering in his honor. He began his remarks by saying, with a grateful heart, I stand before you this morning in my birthday suit. Needless to say, it took a few moments for things to quiet down.

Working on this weekend's homily, reflecting on today's Gospel passage John 3:16, that God so loved the world, what came to mind was the song by Tina Turner entitled, "*What's Love Got to Do with It?*" Thinking about it, the answer to that question is "Everything." Out of curiosity, I looked up the lyrics of song's refrain. I won't sing it, but it goes:

Oh-oh, what's love got to do, got to do with it?

What's love but a second-hand emotion?

What's love got to do, got to do with it?

Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?

For some people, love *is* simply an emotion or a feeling. We know that the word "love" is often used and misused in so many ways. "Love. It's What Makes a Subaru a Subaru." What does that mean? Gimme a break! We really know better.

We are reminded today that true love it is so much more than a feeling. It's one of those things in life that is really hard to put into words. Why? The truth is that it is something that is lived. Today's Gospel makes that clear. Our task is make that a lived truth, something concrete and the guiding principle of our lives.

To believe in Jesus means believing that God loves us, that God cares for us, that God wants nothing more than to forgive us and offers us the best that life can offer. Here, we cannot separate love from belief or belief from love. For some, this is not easy; it's hard to imagine someone loving us unconditionally, always being there with us and for us even when our love for them is so filled with conditions and inconsistent. Here we can remember the father of the prodigal son who longed for nothing than to have his erring son come home so that he could once again shower his love upon him. Jesus gave his life so that people would come to see his Father in this way and come to know him also as our Father.

Another part of believing in Jesus and who he really is truly believing that Jesus is the Son of God, which means that in him is the mind of God, that he knew God so well, was so close

to God, was so one with God, that he could tell us the absolute truth about him, that this wonderful good news is really true.

To believe in Jesus brings something very special to our lives in the here and now. It is the cause, reason and source for real happiness, contentment, fulfillment, enthusiasm, and hope, especially in those difficult and discouraging moments. It brings us the gift of peace with God, with others, with life in general and, mostly importantly, it allows us to be at peace with ourselves, because without that, we cannot be at peace with anyone. Believing in Jesus empowers us to move beyond where we are, to move away from our sinfulness, pettiness and pride, to move outside of our comfort zone and to do things we never thought we could.

I'm sure not many of you have heard of Charlotte Chambers? Well, we all know how rough football is. In 2003, Charlotte returned punts and kickoffs for the Orlando Starz which was part of the Independent Women's Full-tackle Football League. She was only 5'4" and 140 pounds, a great-grandmother of four and, at the time she was playing, she was 70 years old. It's that kind of spirit, attitude and openness to life's possibilities that become a part of us when we truly believe in Jesus; we end up with an undying spirit, full of life that we know and are convinced, will never end.

And so, believing in Jesus enlivens us and gives us something that really defies definition or explanation; it is something we live and experience. Our experience tells us that God is with us, loving us; we need only to look around us and see the signs of that love which come to us in so many ways and in and through the people who love us. Therefore, we need to be open to what is around us, even in the midst of our current struggles and difficulties and the not-so-nice things that we might be experiencing. While the good things that are around us might be a little hidden, they are there to be found, experienced and appreciated. We have to be open to them. Seeing, knowing and believing that we really are loved by God, we love him back and that is how we have a real share in that eternal life here and now and later on. May what we are doing this Lent, help us to experience even more that wonderful truth of how much we are loved by our God, through Jesus, and may our lives give witness to that truth for others that they too may know how much they are loved by God.