Dear friends in Christ,  

On the Ladder of Love  

Let's talk about love and levels of love. Love is so central to Christian identity that it becomes inconceivable to identify oneself as a Christian without visible marks of love as a testimony to the claim. God created us in love and for love, and He is the source of that love. As St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a 13th-century great lover of God and the last of the Church Father, once said, "Love is the fountain of life, and the soul which does not drink from it cannot be called alive." But we ought to love God above all things and with all our life. There is a hierarchy of love. The goal of everyone created in the image and likeness of God is to prioritize their love for the author and source of love above other subjects of legitimate love. It is of utmost importance and highest priority that we love God first to love others rightly. Jesus calls us to love him more than we love our family. He teaches us to order priorities right when it comes to who we love most. To love God as He should be loved is a process and implies lifetime perseverance and progress.

St. Bernard wrote about four categories of the love of God that serves as a helpful guide as it throws light on the perfection of love.

The first degree is selfish love, that is, loving yourself for your own sake. Despite our awareness that God called us to love Him first and above all, the natural impulse is to love self first over God. This selfish love is a consequence of Original sin. It is part of our flawed human nature to self indulge in love for oneself to the detriment of our neighbors; hence we have to strive to overcome this excessive love of self to the expense of the love of God and neighbor. We are called to let this self-love overflow to others and not limited to oneself alone. We have to love God first to love ourselves rightly.

The second degree of love involves loving God for your own blessing-dependence on God. At this stage, you now love God but primarily for your own sake, the love of God for our benefits. At this level of love, a Christian only give thanks to God on account of His goodness to him. It is similar to what people in the secular world call friends with benefits. This type of lover tends to give thanks to God only when he or she receives blessings from Him. This form of love is not yet perfected, though an improvement over the first degree of love.

The third degree of love implies loving God for God's own sake. At this stage, you love God without any self-interest. It is a love that develops from intimacy with God and the discovery of his incredible goodness. It comes from actually having an experiential knowledge of his kindness and mercy. During this stage of love, we love for love's sake, a pure and spontaneous love, not love purely for self-interest.

The fourth degree of love is self-love for God's sake; it is a profound union with God's love. This stage of love at first appears contradictory because we know that self-love is a lower form of love, but when we ponder on it, it is the highest form of love that can only be attained momentarily here on earth and fully in heaven. At this height of love, the lover of God loses himself in God's love. To reach this stage of love is to be truly Christ-like, to be totally immersed in his grace. You decrease and Christ increase to the extent that he is the only one that exists. This highest level of love can be attained only permanently in heavenly as a reward for loving God alone and always.

As people who profess the love of Jesus above all others, let us consider the practice of love and make progress in St. Bernard's proposal on the love of God. 1 John 4:8 tells us that "God is love…we cannot say we know God without love" To love as God wants us to love, Jesus tells us in this Sunday's Gospel, we must take up our cross and follow Him, we must lose our lives in him to gain our lives. The only way to make progress from selfish love to agape love is to die to sin and live "for God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11).

St. Bernard of Clairvaux is not only a lover of God but a troubadour of agape love and you will derive spiritual benefits from singing or frequently meditating on his love lyrics that follow: **Jesus, our only joy be Thou. As Thou our prize wilt be; Jesus, be Thou our glory now and thru eternity.**  
**In the Perfect Love of God, Fr. Bernard Oniwe, OP**
Altar Flowers
In Loving Memory of
Rose Einfalt
Given by the Miklos Family
~
The Blessed Mother Flowers
In Loving Memory of
Dolores Ryan
Given by Deacon Ryan
&
The St Joseph Flowers
In Loving Memory of
Paul Jarosh
Given by Chris Cassel

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

How do you welcome others into your heart? Are you willing to give of yourself for others? Let your heart lead you to follow Jesus. (Matthew 10: 37-42). If God may be calling you to the priesthood or consecrated life, visit our website at www.hbgdiocese.org, call Father Jonathan Sawicki at (717) 657-4804, or write: frjsawicki@hbgdiocese.org.

Eternal Rest Grant Unto Her O Lord, and Let Perpetual Light Shine Upon Her. May All of the Faithful Departed, Through the Mercy of God, rest In Peace. Amen.

Knights of Columbus
Fr. Francis X Marshall
St Peter Council 15028
Scripture Readings
Week of June 28, 2020

Sunday
Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
2 Kgs 4:8-11, 14-16a; Ps 89:2-3, 16-17, 18-19;
Rom 6:3-4, 8-11; Mt 10:37-42

Monday
Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles
Acts 12:1-11; Ps 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9;
2 Tm 4:6-8, 17-18; Mt 16:13-19

Tuesday
The First Martyrs of the Holy Roman Church
Am 3:1-8; 4:11-12; Ps 5:4b-6a, 6b-7, 8;
Mt 8:23-27

Wednesday
Saint Junípero Serra, Priest
Am 5:14-15, 21-24; Ps 50:7, 8-9, 10-11, 12-13,
16bc-17; Mt 8:28-34

Thursday
Am 7:10-17; Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 11; Mt 9:1-8

Friday
Feast of Saint Thomas, Apostle
Eph 2:19-22; Ps 117:1bc, 2; Jn 20:24-29

Saturday
Independence Day
Am 9:11-15; Ps 85:9ab and 10, 11-12, 13-14;
Mt 9:14-17

Sunday
Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Zec 9:9-10; Ps 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13-14;
Rom 8:9, 11-13; Mt 11:25-30

“When the Holy Rosary is said well, it gives Jesus and Mary more glory and is more meritorious than any other prayer. “

~ Saint Louis de Montfort
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION NEWS

We were so disappointed with the abrupt and lengthy closure of our Religious Education classes this year, and we have all missed seeing your children each week. We plan to resume classes in the fall, and information about registration will be available later this summer. In the meantime, it is our first priority to have First Holy Communion for our second graders and Confirmation for our eighth graders. First Holy Communion will be Saturday, July 18th at 10:00am and Confirmation will be the following Saturday, July 25th at 10:00am. More information will follow. Please pray that all of our students and parents remain strong in our faith and their commitment to Religious Education. While so much has changed in our lives, God's Love for us is constant!

2020 VBS UPDATE

It is with a heavy heart that we must announce the official postponement of this summer's Vacation Bible School due to the pandemic. Unfortunately, we must wait another year for “Cathletics,” but we can still use this time to continue our training in becoming Champions of Christ through prayer, attending Mass, reading Scripture, and Works of Mercy. Please stay tuned for a possible “mini event” this August for our young children.

Seven Sorrows School Offering Tours
Enrollment Open

Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary School in Middletown is now enrolling for preschool, elementary, and middle school for the 2020-21 school year. While daily operations may look a little different this year, here’s what hasn’t changed: child-centered, faith-filled education in a safe, nurturing environment.

At Seven Sorrows School, educators encourage children to reach their potential and beyond. As a Catholic school, Seven Sorrows faculty, in partnership with families, prepare children for life, which includes finding their vocation and following God’s calling. Ultimately, according to Principal Rebecca Harvey, “We teach the truth of why they exist: to know God, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world and be happy with Him forever in the next.”

Parents and guardians of preschoolers are invited to take a virtual tour of the school by visiting bit.ly/7SorrowsPreK. Take a look at the beautiful environments where children learn and play in classrooms and outdoor playground and meet the wonderful teachers, ready to welcome young children to the Seven Sorrows School family. For an in-person visit for parents and guardians of children entering PreK-3 through grade 8, schedule an appointment by calling 717-944-5371. Summer operating hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Seven Sorrows is a Middle States Accredited school serving Middletown and surrounding communities. Children in preschool, elementary, and middle school (pre-K 3 through 8th grade) are served in a Catholic environment that educates minds, develops social skills, and nurtures faith. For more information, call 717-944-5371 or visit ssbvm.org/school.