

Father O'Connor's Homily for 4 February 2024  
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time-B

Job 7: 1-4, 6-7

1 Corinthians 9: 16-19, 22-23

Mark 1: 29-39

On this day in February, I thought I would begin by telling you a golf story. [There is hope for spring!] It is about Arnold Palmer playing a golf tournament in Saudi Arabia. The story goes that the king was so impressed that he wanted to give Arnie a gift. Arnie was reluctant to accept anything, but finally gave in and said, "Well, you know, a golf club would be a wonderful memento of this tournament."

The next morning at his hotel, Arnie was delivered a title for a golf course complete with a clubhouse and acres and acres of greens. What a wonderful memento. A golf club indeed!

I wonder today as you and I look at our lives and our ways of operating: what is it that really motivates us? What is it that really drives us to action? Is it money? Now, I see some heads shaking "no" – and I don't believe you! Of course money is a motivator in our lives. What if you were to go to work on Monday and were told by management, "We expect you to be here today and do your job as usual. But we're not going to pay you any longer." Would you come back to work on Tuesday?

The truth of the matter is that we really do need money in our lives. We have bills to pay and responsibilities to meet. But is money the primary motivator in your life?

The Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, tells a story about a rich man who had a deluxe carriage, and was making a journey by night. The carriage moved very smoothly over the roadway, and it felt very warm and secure inside.

Behind the rich man was a poor man who was traveling in an open-air cart. In that cart he felt the bumpiness of the road, and the chill of the night. But the poor man had an advantage over the rich man. From his open cart he had a full view of the stars in the heavens that the Lord had made.

Kierkegaard says that money can enclose us in very comfortable surroundings that can block our view of the vastness of God's power and glory that is all around us.

Is money the principal motivator in your life?

Another motivator can be fear. We can do things in life because we are afraid of what might happen if we don't do them. Now sometimes fear is a very helpful thing. But if fear dominates our life, it doesn't serve us well for the long haul.

There was a company owner that was looking at a map of all the sales territories. On that map there were stick pins that represented each of the sales personnel. And the sales were plummeting. The company owner said to his staff, "Maybe I should take the stick pins out of the map and insert them in each of the sales personnel."

That kind of fear can be a motivator. But it is not a good one. And it can do a lot of harm.

What about the desire to be recognized, to be admired? That is a very powerful motivator – and we can all use a regular dose of this. It is one of the reasons that when the team plays a home-game things tend to be a bit more spirited because of all the people who are cheering their team on.

Recognition and admiration can be great motivators but, unfortunately, they are not always present when we really need them.

So, what about love? Love is really the highest of the motivators – and the purest one: to do something out of love for God and for our neighbor.

Those of you who are parents: if your child needed medical attention that was very critical and very expensive, wouldn't you do all in your power to make that possible – exhausting your savings, selling the house, selling the car, taking on a second or even a third job...would you do this? Of course! Why? Out of love.

We have a saying "I wouldn't do that for love or money." That is only partially true. There are many things that we would not do for money, but there are very few things that we would refuse to do for love.

We look at Saint Paul in today's second reading from his First Letter to the Corinthians [1 Corinthians 9: 16-19, 22-23], and he tells us about what motivated him. He says, "I offer the Gospel free of charge.... I have become all things to all, to save at least some. All this I do it for the sake of the Gospel, so that I too may have a share in it."

Paul was motivated by his love of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – the Lord's Good News for us.

Why else would Paul have undergone such a life-changing conversion and its consequences – where he would be shipwrecked, lonely, beaten, imprisoned and martyred – if it weren't for love? Love of God and love of neighbor. What is the major motivator in our lives? Is it love?

I will leave you with a fable about a little girl who was walking through a meadow. She saw a beautiful butterfly that was impaled on a thorn. She went over and carefully released that butterfly, and presto! The butterfly turned into a beautiful fairy princess.

The fairy princess then asked her, “Young lady, what can I do for you in return? What wish would you like me to grant you?” The little girl thought for a moment and replied, “I would like to be happy every day of my life.”

The fairy princess leaned over and whispered a secret in her ear. The townspeople began noticing a change in her as the months and years moved on. She was clearly the happiest person around, and people wondered what her secret was. She would only say, “It was something the fairy princess told me, but right now it's a secret.”

Just before her death, she decided to reveal that secret. She said to them, “I told the fairy princess that I wanted to be happy every day of my life. And the fairy princess whispered this secret in my ear: ‘Everybody needs you. No matter how secure people may seem to be, everybody needs you.’”

And there is truth to that secret. Lots of people can appear like they've got it all together, that they don't need anything that you or I might have to offer, that they are absolutely just fine the way they are. But that isn't always true. Everybody needs somebody, and there is somebody that needs what you can offer – and which only you can give, out of love.

What is it that motivates you in your life? There can be a host of things – like money or fear or recognition and admiration. But what is at the top of your list? Is it love? Because love – love of God, love of neighbor – ensures that we live happy, meaningful lives right here where we are, with the promise – still to come – of eternal happiness in the kingdom of heaven with God and all of His angels and saints.

Love is the greatest and purest motivator of all.