

Sunday, March 15, 2015 – Jn 3:14-21 – 4th Sunday of Lent
(Trust Walk - “Love like me.”)

One of the great joys of St. Pius X is our regional school with over 600 students that are truly thriving. It thrives because of the teachers, administrators, and parents that are invested in wanting the very best education for our children, and wanting an environment that teaches and lives out the Catholic faith. Friday night I attended an annual fundraising dinner for the Catholic Coalition for Special Education. Ten years ago there were some parents with children of special needs that wanted their children to attend Catholic schools. They simply wanted their children to have the same opportunity that all Catholic children have access to in attending Catholic schools. But, as we know, running any school is challenging in managing its resources so that it can provide the best education for the most students it can. These parents ten years ago understood that challenge. And, they also knew that in their walk with Christ this was a challenge they could take on. So, they started the Catholic Coalition for Special Education with the goal to raise funds to help Catholic schools in our archdiocese hire the teachers and teachers’ aids that can help give children with special needs the same opportunity to a Catholic education as all other children.

SCREEN: [Image – school kids (CCSE)]

This picture shows their success. This picture shows some children with special needs at a school being with their peers side by side, learning and thriving together. I use this as an example of a group of disciples that saw in their *Trust Walk* with Christ to take on this challenge – to put their faith into action in a very real and tangible way to help others – to help fulfill their call to love their neighbors. They are living out loving others as Christ loves them.

Today, I want you to reflect on the questions, ‘How are you being called on your *Trust Walk* with Christ to love like him in this world? How are you called to love others as the body of Christ?’

SCREEN: Trust Walk [main message screen]

Today we celebrate the 4th Sunday of Lent and we are at the midpoint of this penitential season as we continue with our message series called *Trust Walk*.

During these 40 days of Lent we are reflecting on that our Lord is calling us to walk with him in trust. We are being reminded that a *Trust Walk* with our Lord is trusting him to lead us where we are meant to go, and trusting him in what we are called to do. The past three weeks we reflected on that we walk with Christ, we trust in Christ, and we endure with Christ. Today, we are reflecting on that we are called to....

SCREEN: Love like me!

...*Love like Christ!* We are called to be the face of Jesus Christ to every person we encounter in this world. We are called to love others just as Christ loves us. This is what it means to be a true disciples of our Lord. But, how do we strive to fully love like Christ? There is a simple answer: we can only love like Christ if we...

SCREEN: Surrender

...*surrender* to God's will in our lives. A simple answer, but not always easy to do. How do we *surrender* to God's will in our lives? Let us take a look at today's Scripture readings to see how they can help us answer this question.

Our first reading today from the Old Testament is from the 2nd Book of Chronicles. A book of the Bible we do not hear from often. The Book of Chronicles can be understood as a record of the history of God's relationship with His people – it chronicles this history. It is Scripture that is blunt and honest. It tells it like it is – the good, and the bad. Today's reading from Chronicles describes the situation at the time of the Babylonian Exile six centuries before Jesus was born. We heard in today's reading...

SCREEN: *All the princes of JUDAH, the priests, and the people added infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations and polluting the Lord's Temple. Early and often did the Lord send his messengers to them, but they mocked the messengers of God, despised his warnings, scoffed at his prophets.*

...All the princes of JUDAH, the priests, and the people added infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations and polluting the Lord's Temple. Early and often did the Lord send his messengers to them, but they mocked the messengers of God, despised his warnings, scoffed at his prophets.

This is certainly blunt and honest. After all God had done for His people, they completely abandoned their relationship with Him. They ignored God, were unfaithful to God, and rejected His covenant with them, which was the promise of God's love. They added infidelity to infidelity – that is, they divorced themselves from God – completely broke off their relationship. God was angry. And, who could blame Him. God had shown them how much He loved them. He had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, fed them with manna while they wandered in the desert, destroyed their enemies, brought them into the Promised land, raised them as a mighty nation, and made them prosperous. And, how do they show their response to this love? They worship idols turning to other gods and they break away from their relationship with God. But, God never stopped loving them. They may have abandoned God, but God did not abandon them. He was always there for them with His unconditional love. There for them. But, all God can do is

be there with His open arms for His people. The people themselves must take the step and return to Him in order to reconcile and know again of God's love in their lives.

Today's second reading from St. Paul tells us of this never ending hope of how we can turn back to God when we have abandoned Him. We heard St. Paul tell us...

SCREEN: *God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ....raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus*

...*God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ....raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus.* Even when we may feel dead in our relationship with the Lord because of our transgressions, because of our sins against Him, through a life with Jesus Christ we can be reconciled, we can be brought back to the Lord – we can have God's love in our lives. This is truly our focus during the penitential season of Lent. A time we look a little closer at our lives of faith and how we are living that faith. A time we seek to make our relationship living out our *Trust Walk* with the Lord a little stronger.

St. Paul also proclaims in today's reading that we are saved by faith. St. Paul says...

SCREEN: [Image – For by grace you are saved by faith...]

“For by grace you are saved through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, it is not from works so that no one can boast.” What this is saying is we are saved by faith, and not by works. There are two clear points to draw from these words. Works alone will not bring us into eternal life with the Lord. Good works can be done without any faith. However, true faith, real faith, cannot exist without good works that flow out of living a true, real faith. If we have faith, we believe in living out all that Jesus taught us, we believe the Great Commandment that as disciples of Jesus Christ we are called to love God and love our neighbors, to clothe the poor, to help the sick. If we have faith, in all that we profess before our Lord that we believe, then good works must flow out of that faith in which we profess. If they do not, then how real is our faith?

I return again now to the questions, ‘How are you being called on your *Trust Walk* with Christ to love like him in this world? How are you called to love others as the body of Christ?’ The how in these questions is in when we surrender to God's will in our lives. When we surrender to God's will, we then can know how we are

called to love like Christ in this world. And, ultimately, this is how we are shown the *Trust Walk* with Christ in which we are called to walk.

Today's Gospel easily sums up how to surrender to God's will, and shows us how much Christ loved us.

SCREEN: [Image – God loved the world...]

“God loved the world He gave His only son. Whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.” John 3:16. Verse 16 from chapter three of the Gospel of John.

Words we heard proclaimed here today. Probably the most common scripture verse we hear proclaimed and cited out in the world beyond the doors of our churches. Jesus surrendered his life completely for his Father's will. That is the ultimate act of surrendering to God. In Christ's surrender, we are called to see our own calling to surrender – our calling to love like Christ loves his Father's children.

As I said, surrendering to God's will is not always easy. But, the reward is great! The reward is true joy, true fulfillment, and true happiness in this life. A reward far greater than any other reward this earthly world can offer us. And, the ultimate

reward in surrendering to God's will in our lives, will be our place with our Lord in heaven.

You may have noticed I am wearing a new vestment today. It is a rose vestment. This optional color is worn only two times during the year. Most priests do not have a rose vestment, not because some people say it is pink, but because it is a lot of money to spend for something to be worn just twice a year. But, very generously the Sacred Heart Council of the Knights of Columbus gave this vestment to me as a gift. We can wear the rose vestment once during Lent, and once during Advent. Both times to signify joy. On this Sunday at the midpoint of Lent, we proclaim...

SCREEN: “**Laetare Jerusalem**”
“**O be joyful, Jerusalem**”

“Laetare Jeruslaem” That is, *“O be joyful, Jerusalem.”* We are proclaiming joy, in the midst of this penitential season of Lent, because we know of the hope given to us in our faith because of the Lord, Jesus Christ. This hope St. Paul tells us today. This hope we recognize in the verse 3:16 from the Gospel of John. So, today is a day to reflect on that hope. It is the hope in the joyful Easter we will celebrate in just three weeks – the hope of resurrection.

So, at this midpoint of Lent, how are you doing? Have you lived up to the Lenten promises you made on Ash Wednesday? Or, have you fallen on some of those promises? The beauty of these 40 days, and really our entire lifetime journey of faith, is when we fall, our Lord Jesus Christ helps us get up. If you have messed up on your Lenten promises, pick yourself up, and try again. And, the place where we can all start, no matter where we are in our journey, is to strive today, and every day, fulfilling our call to love like Christ. As we now celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist, as we see the real presence of Christ before us and come up to receive him, let us reflect on this is his love, in his very flesh and blood, given to us on the cross when he surrendered his life for ours. Then, let us take that real presence of Christ we receive today outside of the doors of our church and be the love of Christ to every person God puts within our path. Let us go forth and love like Christ.

Amen!