"They Love Me... They Love Me Not..."

Daily Gospel / Liturgycal Cycle C

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Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Matthew 12: 38-42.
Some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." He said to them in reply, "An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here. At the judgment the queen of the south will arise with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and there is something greater than Solomon here."
Matthew 12:38-42.

Introductory Prayer:
Lord, my prayer will “work” only if I have humility in your presence. So I am approaching you with meekness and humility of heart. I have an infinite need for you and your grace. Thinking about this helps me grow in humility. I trust in you and your grace. Thank you for the unfathomable gift of your love.

Petition:
Lord, let me love the way you love – with self-giving generosity.

1. The Hurdle of Pride:
“Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” The relationship of the scribes and Pharisees with Jesus is uni-directional. They demand that he perform a sign if he wishes to be found worthy of their esteem, but they have closed their hearts to any possible openness toward him in advance. Pride makes impossible demands on others and will not be satisfied until these impossible demands are met! Thus pride is never satisfied. It is the cause of division, resentment and bitterness in relationships. Rather than make demands on Christ, we need to make demands on ourselves. We need to make demands that we grow in humility, selflessness and authentic love in imitation of the Lord.

2. To Love or Not to Love:
Pope Benedict XVI teaches us about self-giving love in his encyclical letter, Deus Caritas Est. Commenting on the Song of Songs, he writes: “The poems contained in this book were originally love-songs, perhaps intended for a Jewish wedding feast and meant to exalt conjugal love. In this context it is highly instructive to note that in the course of the book two different Hebrew words are used to indicate ‘love.’ First there is the word dodim, a plural form suggesting a love that is still insecure, indeterminate and searching. This comes to be replaced by the word ahabà. By contrast with an indeterminate, ‘searching’ love, this word expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved, it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice” (no. 6).

3. Nineveh and Love:
Jesus tells us that at the Judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with the generation of people surrounding him and condemn it. The reason is that the contemporaries of Jonah repented at his preaching. True self-giving love begins with repentance. When I repent I acknowledge the person of God who is worthy of all my love. I feel remorse for having loved him so little or for having offended him who is all love. Love-filled remorse implies a bending of my will affectionately toward the other. This is a form a self-giving love that we can all achieve at any moment of our lives.

Conversation with Christ:
Lord, I love you. I want to strengthen the habit of self-giving love within me. Presently my love is weak and short-lived. I can always practice loving sorrow for having offended you. Lord, grant me the grace of practicing contrition of heart throughout the day.

Resolution:
Today I will practice contrition in order to grow in effective love.