

Welcome, everyone, on this Fourth Sunday of Lent, as we continue to focus on prayer. If you find the topic of prayer somewhat intimidating, don't worry. We all have to learn how to pray, and as we can expect whenever we start to learn something new, it may feel somewhat awkward and unfamiliar when we first start to develop a life of prayer. Don't worry, that's perfectly natural, and you'll grow more comfortable as you get into the habit of prayer.

Last week at our Prayer Fair, you had the opportunity to browse the many prayer ministries we offer here at the parish and the various resources we have for prayer. I encourage you to take advantage of those, they are there for you and your formation. Today, at the end of this homily, I'm going to invite you to show God your intention to grow in your prayer life this year by bringing forward your pledge card that you received in the mail and placing it in the basket at the altar, making your commitment a part of the offering that we make today.

Part of what moves us to make that offering is the realization of God's love for us. We read in today's gospel that God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish, but might have eternal life. That's *how much* God loves us, so much so that He

gave us His only Son. Notice what isn't there, though. It doesn't say *why* God loves us. It doesn't tell us what we did to deserve that love.

And that's for good reason. We didn't do anything to deserve His love. You know, it is a particularly nasty thing our fallen world does to us when it says, "Convince me why I should love you. Convince me why I should respect you. Convince me why the quality of your life is such that I should honor it and defend it, and not treat it as disposable. Make your case."

That message is out there in the world, and if we fall for this trap, we then spend our energy trying to make our case: what kind of job we have, what kind of house we live in, what kind of vacations we take, what kind of children we raise, what kind of body we have, what kind of grades we get, how many friends we have, how many people like who we are. It is as if we can use that as a measuring stick to determine how good we are and worthy of love.

Of course, that is a game that is very difficult to win, because we'll always fall short in some area, which can lead to shame. "Oh, I don't live up to some arbitrary standard of beauty, I don't have the career and salary I feel I should have, my marriage and family haven't turned out the way I wanted them to." We all have some area in our life where we can say that. And we

can mistakenly think that that affects who we are as a person, and whether we deserve the love and respect of the people around us. If we decide that we don't, then we withdraw, and try to hide that part of our life, because it makes us unworthy of love.

That might be what the world tells us, but that is not how it is with God. We do not have to first make ourselves worthy of love before God will love us, we do not have to convince Him, make our case. God loves us because He is good, full stop. It is not because of what we could do for Him, not because of what we achieve, not because of how successful we live this life by the world's standards. He loves us because He is good, and He so loved us, that He sent us His Son to die for us on the cross.

It is *gratitude* for that love that moves us to offer our lives to Him, including the offering of prayer that we make. Our offering of prayer helps us remember who we are: we are children of God. The time we spend in prayer can quiet the voices of the world that make us feel unworthy of love, and places us in the presence of our good and loving God. It helps us remember that we live for Him, and that it is in Him that we find our ultimate fulfillment. Spending time in prayer each day shows God our gratitude for

His great goodness, but even more so, it benefits us. It reminds us that we live our life for Him.

But whatever offering we make will be imperfect until we unite it to the perfect offering of Jesus Christ. That is why you will be invited shortly to bring your offering up to the altar, where Jesus Christ will make *his* offering.

I've been told that some might be hesitant to come forward and place their pledge card at the altar because they don't want it to look like they're showing off, making a public spectacle of the fact that they are making a commitment to pray. Be at peace, that is not the motivation behind this exercise. We *all* need to unite our offering to Christ's offering if we want it to be pleasing to our heavenly Father, and so that is all you'll be doing.

The other part of that pledge card is a place for you to write down any intentions you would especially like your brothers and sisters here to remember in our prayers. What crosses are you carrying that we can help with? What sufferings are you or your loved ones experiencing that we can all lift up in prayer together at today's Mass? You are not alone. Let your brothers and sisters here pray for you and support you in any way that you need.

Some of you have already turned in your pledge cards, and those are here in the basket already. If you didn't bring your pledge card with you, we do have more that you can pick up. If we run out, write it down on a piece of scratch paper, or even just mentally make your offering and come forward and place it at the altar. God so loved you that He gave you His only Son, so that you might have eternal life. Let us show our gratitude for this love by the offering that we make today.