

There is a story about a man who had been out of work for almost a year.... So when he saw an add for a job at the local zoo, he decided to check it out...When he got there, he was told that the zoo's main attraction – the gorilla – had died suddenly, and they needed someone to put on a gorilla suit and take the gorilla's place until the zoo could find another real gorilla...It was kind of bizarre, but the guy was desperate, so he took the job....His boss told him it was very important not to do anything that would give visitors the slightest clue that he wasn't a real gorilla...The job was very simple. He'd spend a lot of time in his gorilla suit sitting on a big rock...and every 15 minutes or so, he'd grab onto a long rope and swing on it.... He would swing from his rock across the lion's pit to the other side, ...then swing over the lion's pit back to his rock....This went on for a week and no one suspected that he wasn't a real gorilla....But he was getting bored doing the same thing over and over, and one day as he swung over the lion's pit, he got a little careless,... lost his grip on the rope, fell right into the pit....and landed 20 yards away from this ferocious looking lion...Frightened out of his wits, he tried to get up but his legs were too numb to move...As the lion started to slowly walk toward him, he yelled out, "Somebody get me outta here!"...When the beast got so close that he could feel its hot breath,...his yells turned to screams of terror..."HELP!! HELP!!"... Finally, the lion was right in his face,... opened its mouth ...and said..."Shut up, you idiot, before you get us both fired!"

Ok, so what the heck does this silly story have to do with today's Scripture readings?...Well, what did the man in the gorilla suit think when he saw the lion coming toward him?...That he was about to be mauled to death, right?...But what happened?...He found out that the lion was really just like himself, a poor slob trying to do his job...So, the story is an example of making an unfair judgment about someone based on outward appearances,...and that's what St. James is addressing in our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading...James is one of my favorite Bible writers because he is so clear and practical in how he presents the ways God wants His people to live out their faith...You don't have to be a Bible scholar to understand what James is saying. ...Last week he urged us to be "doers" of God's Word, not just hearers. ...Next week he warns us that faith without good works is a dead faith...And today he tells us that followers of Christ must treat people without discrimination, without prejudice...In other words, the way God treats us.

In today's passage, James cites an example of discrimination that he might have witnessed himself as pastor of the church in Jerusalem...A man dressed in fine clothes and jewelry comes into church and the usher treats him with admiration and respect as he guides him to a special seat with a footstool to prop up his feet...Then a man wearing shabby clothes enters the church, and he is told he has to stand, or sit on the cold, hard floor next to the smelly feet of the rich guy. James uses this very vivid example to get his point across...and it's not that we shouldn't treat someone poorly because they can't afford nice clothes...That's obvious...What He's illustrating is a deeper and fuller truth about what we are doing when we are prejudiced toward people, ...when we discriminate against them...In verse 4 James says when we do this, we are deciding the criteria by which we judge whether or not a person is good, important, valuable, worthy of our respect ...In verses 8 and 9, James says this is a sin against God's commandment to love your neighbor as you love yourself...Good old straight talking James, telling it like it is....Prejudice, discrimination are sins...Period!

This message from James is important because – like the Christians in his day – we need to understand that in God's eyes all people – ALL people – are equally precious...As Christians we simply have to get this right...We have to get it through our heads that it is wrong, wrong, wrong to discriminate against anyone...It is wrong to withhold *Christ-like* love from anyone...And

Christ-like love – which in the original Greek of the Bible is called *agape*’ - is a love which says to EVERY person: “I care about U.”

“I don’t care about what you look like, what clothes you wear, what color you are,...I don’t care about your gender, your race, your ethnic background, your accent...I don’t care where you live,... what you do for a living, how much money you make...I don’t care where you went to school,...how smart you are,...I don’t care about your politics,...I don’t care about your religion,... I don’t care about Ur sexual orientation,...I care about U, ...about your wellbeing, ...about Ur welfare,...I may not think like you do, or believe as you do...I may not agree with how you live your life...I may not like some of the things you do...But you are a child of God – like me – created with a heart and soul and spirit in the image of God... You are like me – a sinner who can only be saved by the cross of Jesus Christ... Because God created you...and His Son died for you...then I must love you! ...That, my friends, is *agape*’, the love Jesus modeled for us,...the love He commands of His followers when He says **“Love one another as I have loved you.”**...Love that has NO conditions...Love that does not discriminate...Love that wants only good for every other child of God.

Discrimination and prejudice divide us....They keep us from being the one people of God - the family of G....In The Book of Revelations, John, in describing his vision of heaven, says, *“When I saw them around the Throne of God, I saw a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and tongue.”*...Imagine what heaven’s going to be like,... people from every nation, race, and tongue united – maybe even dancing - around the throne of God... Wouldn’t it be great if that same unity could be with us here on earth, right now?

But, unfortunately, Satan is working overtime to divide us,...to create division among the different members of God’s people,...because when we are divided, we are weaker. When we are divided, it’s a lot easier for Satan to keep us from following Jesus Christ...When we are divided, we see each other as the enemy, and we ignore the real enemy who will never give up trying to turn us away from God.

I once heard a WWII veteran say that in a war you don’t care about the color or nationality or religion of the guy fighting next to you as long as he’s shooting in the same direction...That’s all that matters in a war...Well, we’re in a war right now,...a war against Sin and Evil,... a war we’re going to lose unless all of us who believe in the One God start shooting in the same direction and stop shooting at each other.

Ok, so where’s the Good News in all this?....My preaching professor insisted that every homily has to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ...The Good News today is that WE HAVE THE POWER,..you and I, all of us, have the power to make a difference in this war against the forces threatening the unity of God’s people...**#1** Each of us has the power to refrain from all discrimination or prejudice toward people different from us...**#2** We have the power – by our words and by our own example- to lead others to do the same,...especially our child-ren... **#3**...We have the power to stand up and speak out whenever we see or hear someone talk about or treat another person or group with prejudice or disrespect.

Where do we get this power ? (*point to altar*)...Right there!...From the Eucharist, from the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ!... Jesus said, “I am the living bread come down from heaven...”...Living Bread!...My friends, the Eucharist is alive...The host we receive is NOT a thing...It is NOT bread...It is a person, and He is alive...If we truly believe that the Living Christ is in us,...then everything we do as Catholics - how we live,...the decisions we make,...our moral code, ...how we treat others – flows from the power of the Living Christ we carry within us as we walk out that door and go back into the world.

As we come forward in a few minutes to receive the Living Christ, let our prayer be that His presence within us will empower us and strengthen us to go out into our divided world and make a difference. AMEN!