

## Novena of Grace Day 1 Homily

3 March 2018

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Welcome to the beginning of the St. Francis Xavier novena of grace at St. Ignatius Parish. How about that? Two Jesuit saints for the price of one, well, actually none. Prayer is free. But what a graced time we share during this novena which is a time to bring our prayers, the things we hold dear to because they are precious to us—our wants, our desires, our needs are precious to us because they matter. And so we bring all these individual prayers together and for nine days and we offer up our individual prayers to our good and gracious God, asking for St. Francis Xavier to intercede on our behalf. And why not ask Xavier for a little extra help in bringing our prayers from our lips to God's ear? After all, our prayers, though personal and individual, are offered up and placed humbly before our loving God not with the sound of a single, individual voice, but rather the sound of many voices brought together as one. We come together, as we always do in this sacred space, but even more so now with greater intent, to pray with one another and for one another. We may not know each person's prayers, and we don't have to know in order to ask that God, who's abundant grace is boundless, might hear not only our individual prayers, but also the prayers of everyone who gathers here together as a community. This novena brings together many people, many individuals with many prayers all offered up with one voice, a voice expressed with one breath, and breath made possible by one heart—the voice, the breath and the heart of one community who chooses to gather together and pray as one along with all those whom would love to join us. They too pray with us. They too are gathered with us, praying with us as one body, the body that is church, the body that is Christ, the body of Christ whose arms are outstretched in prayer longing to embrace and be embraced by our loving God, the arms that long to welcome or welcome back into our lives a sense of peace.

The theme of our novena is “Embracing Peace in a Broken World.” This theme is an acknowledgement and a statement. It acknowledges a reality that we, collectively, might find ourselves living in what we perceive as a broken world. A world, a nation, a community in need of healing or a coming-together. And it can be an acknowledgment that we find ourselves, in our own personal worlds, in our own lives, we find ourselves in a time and place that seems separated from God, from others, especially those we love, or even from our own being in which we acknowledge something needs to change. So, we come together with our own acknowledgements that in some way we have a brokenness, we have something we wish to change, we have some need for healing, or we have a longing to be, or continue to have the strength and willingness to be, a loving, compassionate, and genuine person. We acknowledge all this, but what is the statement? What is it that we are willing to do? The statement may vary from person to person, after all we are all seeking something from our personal prayers, but collectively and as a whole, as individuals who gather together in search of something, I think what we are willing to do, if we have the courage to be so audacious, to be so bold—and I think we just might be so bold since we have chosen to gather here today—I think what we are willing to do is to seek out, hope for, and choose to embrace peace. Our statement to embrace peace, is also our prayer.

It is our prayer that we might know more fully how God is calling us to come together as God’s people. A people who are, like we hear from Micah, who are God’s inheritance—God’s people—we belong to God. We belong to a God who longs to know the ways in which we hope to change, the ways in which we acknowledge the need for a healing that is made ever more possible, ever more a reality from the graces that flow from a God who can remove guilt, pardon our sins, and move our hearts towards a conversion that reorients our gaze towards God. This is the realization of the lost son in our Gospel. The realization of someone who, after selfishly wanting to do that which served himself, recognized that he had a need and so he humbly sought forgiveness. Crestfallen and penitent, he made his way back home to seek forgiveness. How joyful, though he did not expect it, was the moment when he recognized the reality that the warm embrace of forgiveness was not willing to wait for him to arrive, but rather ran after to greet him. It is sad to see that the older brother, whose right acts ensured for himself a place of privilege, could not free himself from his own hurt

so to welcome back his brother. But this parable, as it was in Jesus' time, is a mirror in which we just might see ourselves. Sometimes we are the obstinate older brother or sister focused on our own hurts and unwilling to forgive those who seek forgiveness. Sometimes we are the father or mother, elated that a broken bond, a broken relationship, has been repaired, and sometimes, perhaps more often than not, we are the one who is lost, searching for our way home only to discover God finding us first and welcoming us with an embrace and a kiss.

God's love manifests itself in many ways. Ways in which I hope we experience during our novena. And one of those ways is forgiveness. Such boundless forgiveness that God offers is the fruitful soil of God's love that if we are courageous and willing to accept, such forgiveness will be the soil in which we plant our seeds for peace, hoping with confidence that such a peace will sprout, blossom, and bloom.