

Sunday 4.

Last Monday I had the opportunity to visit the San Miguel School in Providence. Perhaps you have heard of it. It was founded seventeen years ago by Brother Lawrence Goyette, a member of the Brothers of the Christian Schools who run La Salle High School in Providence. Brother Lawrence founded this school seventeen years ago to help prepare disadvantaged boys for entrance into good high schools. So it is a middle school. That is to say that it has four grades: the fifth, the sixth, the seventh and the eighth. There are fifteen students in each class. So the total student body is just sixty. Almost all of them are African American, and many of them come from desperate home situations. But when you meet them at school, they are courteous and respectful.

The school is on Carter St. which is off Broad St. in Providence. It had been a Lutheran parish school. So it has both a church now used for large school functions and a classroom building. When Brother Lawrence began the school, there was just one other school like it in the nation, a school in Lower Manhattan called Nativity Prep. Today there are about 66 Nativity and San Miguel schools in the country. I could not help but think that there should be one more here in Woonsocket housed in the beautiful little school next to us, Our Lady of Victories' school. But to do that we would have to come up with a great deal of money.

Most of the students at these schools pay very little, if anything at all. Yet the cost to educate them is \$85,000 a year.

When I arrived there on Monday morning, I was met by Brother Lawrence who assigned two students, Chris and Jacob, to show me the school. They were very good tour guides. Then I attended the morning assembly when all the students were addressed by some of the teachers and one boy was singled out as the San Miguel man of the week. There was perfect discipline and yet great involvement on their part, with many hands raised to answer the questions posed by the teachers. In short, the place is inspiring. Whatever the situation of these boys may be at home, in this school they have found others interested in them and respectful of them, and they thereby learn to be such to each other.

Our first reading today from Jeremiah is the story of this prophet's being called by God. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you..." God says to Jeremiah. Can you imagine how these words changed Jeremiah's understanding of himself? If he ever had any doubts about his own worth, his own self-importance, these words must have dissolved them. For how could he think poorly of himself when he now knew that God thought so highly of him.

Those of you who are parents must understand this passage well. When your children were small and you noticed that one of them was lacking in self-confidence, did you not try to show him extra love and concern so that he could realize that he or she was someone important, someone worthwhile? Our Christian faith does the same thing for us. When we are tempted to believe that we are not worth much, it reminds us of the fact that God loves us and that His love makes us very important, very worthwhile. Indeed it even goes so far as to tell us that God loved us so much that in Jesus of Nazareth he became one of us. If there is anything that our faith has to say to our world today, it is this message of God's overwhelming love and its consequence, our realization of our own worth and value. And that is what this school is doing for these children.

If the message of our faith is God's love for us, then it is clear that we ought to love God in return and also each other. And now our second reading, perhaps the most famous reading of the New Testament, tells us what love is like. All we have to do, then, is to ask ourselves if we are living in love. Are we impatient? Are we jealous of others? Are we pompous and arrogant? Are we selfish? Are we revengeful, gloating when others who have offended us are in trouble? If we are, we are not

living in a loving way and therefore have not yet grasped what it means to be a Christian.

In our Gospel today Jesus aroused the hatred of his fellow townies, the people of Nazareth, because they want him to be their boy. They don't want to share him with the world. But he won't accept this definition of himself and tells them so. He is going to be like the prophets of old who did not restrict themselves to their fellow Jews. He is going to bring his message to a larger, a Gentile, audience. They did not like that. "But so be it," Jesus must have thought to himself. "I know who I am, and I am not what they think I am."

As we age and become a little more reflective, we sometimes ask ourselves what we have done with our lives and who we have become. "Do I know who I am?" we sometimes ask ourselves. We probably should not worry too much about answering that question. We should be content to say to ourselves. I know that I am beloved of God, and I am trying to live in love. That is enough. If I do that, I will soon enough find out who I am and who I have become. God will tell me: "You are my beloved."