

# **Solemn Novena to St. Ann**

## **100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

**July 21, 2024**

### **Preaching of Rev. Justin Nelson Alphonse, C.P.**

There is an old joke said about Adam and Eve. Once Adam and Eve were walking in the garden, Eve asked a question to Adam. Adam, do you love me? And Adam responded, who else? She was not happy with the answer. So, a few minutes later, she asked him again, Adam, do you love me? And this time Adam was very careful and said, yes honey, I really love you. Still, she was not convinced. That late evening when Adam was deep asleep, she was messing on his chest. And at the time, suddenly Adam got up from his sleep and said, honey, what are you doing? And she responded, I am just checking whether any other ribs are missing from your side. And Adam was so upset, he said, God, you gave this woman so beautiful and I love her, why did you create her so dumb? And God responded, so that she could love you.

You know, we all like to be loved. We all like to be understood. We all like to be cared. I think that's what Jesus came into this world, to show us love, how to love, how to share God's love with one another.

When a lawyer came to Jesus and asked, what is the most important commandment of all the laws? There were 613 laws in the Old Testament where they have to follow. What is the most important commandment of all those laws? They asked this to test Jesus, but Jesus gave a beautiful response. The first commandment is love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And he goes on to say the second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. So, for Jesus, love of God and love of neighbor is like the two sides of a coin. It is like the cross.

God is interested in the love of man between God and man and a love between man and man, both horizontal and vertical. And very often in every religion speaks about love and very often they all struggle to live this message of love in their life. And one of the things, beautiful things that I learned in the past several years from a Buddhist monk who lives in Perth in Western Australia. And she gives this beautiful message and which I really was taken into my life. And he asked this three questions in life. If somebody asked you a question, who is the most important person in your life, who would you say? Just tell yourself honestly.

And then if somebody asked you a question, what is the most important thing to do in your life, what would you say? If somebody asked you a question, when is the most important time in your life, what would you say? I ask these questions to people and very often I get the response, who is the most important person in your life? Jesus, God, parents, grandparents, friend, their child. And if you have those in mind, I want you to think differently from today onwards. The most important person in your life is the person whom you are with.

If you are with your spouse, your spouse is the most important person in your life. If you are with your children, your children become the most important person in your life. If you are with your friend, your friend becomes the most important person in your life. If you're in the church, God becomes the most important person in your life. If you're with a stranger, the stranger is the most important person in your life.

What is the most important thing to do in your life? If you have to say, to pray, to go to heaven, to forgive, to love, if you have those things in mind, I want you to think differently. The most important thing to do in your life is to take care of the one whom you're with and show them your love and care for them. When you're with your spouse, how do you show your love and care for her or him? When you're with your friend, how do you show your love and care for your friend? When you're with your children, how do you show your love and care for your children? When you're with God, how do you show your love and care for your God?

And when is the most important time in your life? The most important time in your life is right now. Past is gone. Future, we do not know what to expect. What we have is right now. That's why it is beautifully said, whenever you are worried or depressed, you're living in the past. Whenever you're anxious, you're living in the future. Whenever you're at peace, you're living in the present. As another way of saying, past is history. Future is a mystery. Present is a gift. God has given each day as a gift to all of us.

And he wants us to live that gift by loving one another. As Jesus himself showed us, love one another as I have loved you. Jesus' love is unconditional, pure, kind, compassionate, and sacrificial. There is no better love than to lay down one's life for your friend.

I remember a beautiful story about something that happened in Birmingham for me. I've been in this country in and out for almost 20 years now. The first seven years, it took me seven years to see a \$2 bill in this country. And as soon as I saw it, I took my wallet and gave two \$1 bills to them. And I said, I will take it because I have never seen a \$2 bill. And I'm sure many of you have seen this \$2 bill. And I kept it for a month and a half in a safe envelope so that I could show it to my friends and family.

One day I watched this movie called The Unconditional Love. It's a true story about a man who goes around giving \$2 bills to complete strangers. And for him, it was a symbol of love. And in this movie, one day he gets killed and his wife is trying to find who the killer was. And through the \$2 bill, she finds who the killer was. But during this movie, on the day of the funeral, his wife gives a beautiful eulogy which really touched my life. And she says about her husband Billy, Billy was a good man and I love him so much. And Billy had a beautiful habit of giving \$2 bills to complete strangers. For him, \$2 bill was a symbol of love. And she goes on to say, there are millions of \$2 bills in this country. You hardly see them because people hoard them. And she goes on to say, there is so much love in this world. We just have to share it.

There is so much love in this world, we just have to share it. And my dear brothers and sisters, there are so many opportunities that God gives us in our life. And let us share that love.

That's why in today's first reading, love is patient, love is kind, love is not jealous, love is not pompous. And he goes on to say, it bears all things. Love believes all things. Love hopes all things. Love endures all things. Love never fails.

As the beautiful saying that says, when you are beautiful, when you are beautiful, it is God's gift to you. When your life is beautiful, it is your gift to God. God wants all our life to be beautiful.

Let us live that life that Jesus has showed us by sharing his love even to his death on the cross. So, as we celebrate this novena, let us reflect and always remember that the one I am with is the most important person in my life. And show my love and care for them at this moment.

As I conclude, as Mother Teresa beautifully said it, we all have a mission. We all have a mission. A mission to love. Amen