



From the Office of the President

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REGIS UNIVERSITY | DENVER, COLORADO

**Homily for the Fifth Sunday of Lent (B)
Regis University, St. John Francis Regis Chapel
March 18, 2018**

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20-33

Last November, right before Thanksgiving, I was starting an eight-day retreat with more than ordinary reluctance. I was busy and in the middle of the semester; I was late in scheduling my annual retreat; my prayer was dry even arid, if faithfully done and with a fair amount of longing; the upcoming solitude and more engaged prayer would make me face myself in ways not always pleasant (Kavanaugh, *The Word Encountered*, 47).

Honestly, I felt particularly unprepared. I loved my work, my God, my life but was a weary and felt terribly self-centered. When I met with my director, Sister Barbara Quinn, RSCJ, a classmate from theology days in Boston, and laid out my situation, she smiled and quietly said, "Great. You're just where you should be when you enter the presence of God."

Her engagement seemed a bit glib; my ego was a little bruised; and it all sounded a little too much like, "don't worry, be happy" to me. Then she called me up short and asked, "How does every Mass begin?" "Uh, well, 'In the name of the Father...'" "No, what's the first formal part of the Eucharist?"

"The Penitential Rite," I replied; she had reminded me that the acknowledgement of sin was the condition for entry into the covenant of the Eucharist. I began to feel the dam break in my heart. "It is impossible to enter the presence of God, whether in [prayer, liturgy, or in a community], as a self-made man or woman. We cannot enter the covenant blameless or spotless. Nor can we rely upon our good works to make us worthy of this covenant. The only contribution we make to this covenant is the acknowledgment of our sin, [our brokenness, our need of God] and the trust that it is healed by the redemptive power of God's love" (Kavanaugh, *The Word Encountered*, 49).

So, how do we come to know this covenant with God? How can we know the heart of God? If God's heart is bigger, infinitely bigger than our longing, how can we know the love that God feels for us?



We might well look at love's opposite - shame. Hate is not the antipode of love; shame is a better candidate, I think, because nothing divides human beings like shame. Nothing saps human community like cloying, sticky fear, fear that is the offspring of shame; we don't want to be found out. Shame isolates, withers, and kills. Love brings people, hearts and minds together in their differences and makes a rich, diverse unity without uniformity. Shame isolates and fragments one heart from another; all the energy of life goes into hiding and protecting the vulnerability that must be hidden. Shame keeps me from trusting you; it is the opposite of love, the opposite of presence.

Notice that Jeremiah the prophet gives voice to what God wants from us: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the old covenant... I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts ... and they shall know me."

Notice too, that the Greek believers, the "God-fearers," second-class citizens of the Covenant, want to see and speak with Jesus. Their longing finds an open heart in Jesus.

This is how we know the heart of God; this is how we know the depth of God's love for us - just as we are. Our admission of sin and frailty, our not allowing shame to win, is the acceptance and trust in God's love. It alone makes all the difference.