



A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop Michael Jackels

14 December 2021

Celebrating Divine Love among us

When I was about 9-years old, I gave a neighbor girl a gift and then asked her: Do you love me? expecting the gift would force her to say yes; she said no. Why do I *remember* that?

And when my mom had to punish a naughty 9-year-old, I was sure I had fallen from her good graces, so I asked her: Do you love me? She said yes, but I didn't believe her.

Why do I remember *that*? Indeed! I remember because it's a thing, you know; we're born with the question, and we're nagged by the answer, or the lack, or our doubts thereof.

As a result, we remember people and events that make us ask, and wonder if we can trust the answer, and somehow learn that we have to earn love, or that we can lose it.

As long as love is tied to human calculation – owe, deserve; earn, lose – it'll be a strings-attached, conditional love, making us ask if we're loved, and wondering about the answer.

That's why I have 9-year-old-Mike memories of asking and wondering. But I also have memories of when and how I first experienced a no-strings-attached, *unconditional* love.

I was 33-years old, an intentional Catholic for 14 years, ordained for 6 years, in Rome, studying towards a doctorate in theology, focused on the writings of St. Catherine of Siena.

God to Catherine in prayer: I fixed my eyes on what is eternally beautiful about you, and so fell in love with the very idea of you, creating, saving, providing for you in spite of your sins.

Catherine reflecting on the pierced heart of Christ crucified: The wound reveals the secret of the heart, that Divine Love can't ever be exhausted, not even by death; there's no end to it.

And Catherine commenting on the commandment to love your neighbor: Remember that you yourself are your closest neighbor to whom you owe kindness, care, forgiveness.

I remember that because unconditional love gives serenity no storm can shake. I came late to the knowing, but that should tell others it's not too late for them; they can know it too...

By looking to Jesus: His birth as man put skin on Divine Love, as if saying: I'm here. I love you. You can neither earn nor lose my love. I will protect you forever - remember that!

That's what we celebrate at Christmas. That's all we need for it to be a merry Christmas. That's all we need for it to be a happy New Year.

May both be so for you and yours. Amen.

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