

Homily on Love
St. Theresa's Church
April 26-27, 2008

In his best selling book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Mitch Albom writes about his conversations with his dying former professor, Morrie. One conversation is about a meaningful life. Morrie describes it this way – “devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself in creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.” I believe that this is the essence of Jesus' words in our Gospel – “Whoever receives my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me.”

During his recent visit to the United States, the Holy Father, in his homily at Yankee Stadium, talking about us “putting on the mind of Christ” said:

“We become the light of the world, the salt of the earth, entrusted with the “apostolate” of making our own lives, and the worlds in which we live, conform ever more fully to God's saving plan.”

What is God's saving plan?

Outside the walls of this church, do the people walking on South Kihei Road know that we are Christians by what they hear us say and see what we do? Over the seven years that I have preached at St. Theresa's, you have heard many homilies on the need for us to love others. We love them by caring for their needs. For example, we could work to eliminate the severe shortage of homes available for purchase or rent by workers/the poor/the elderly/the disabled in our community. I have asked us as a church community to work together to make things pono (right) for our least fortunate brothers and sisters. Some have come to me and said that you want to help but you are overwhelmed by the bigness of the problems like the housing issue.

What is God's saving plan?

When Pope Benedict said that we must treat our immigrant brothers and sisters with justice and dignity, he was criticized as marketing his faith by Congressman Tom Tancredo and CNN newsman Lou Dobbs. In the Pope's defense, the Wall Street Journal wrote on April, 22nd, "the pope welcomes immigrants because he's catholic, not because they are. He is not marketing his faith. He is practicing it."

Like the pope, St. Theresa's Church has been questioned by some of our neighbors about feeding our hungry brothers and sisters. The criticism centered on the notion that we were attracting "these people" to their neighborhood and they demanded that we stop feeding. But as church, we have stood our ground because Jesus has told us in Matthew 25 that "whatever you did for one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

What is God's saving plan?

It is not the popular thing to reach out to the least fortunate among us, but it is God's saving plan. But how do we make His plan real?

In May of 2007, Greg Galluzo of the Gamaliel Foundation, a training institute for faith based community organizing and affiliated with FACE, came to Maui to introduce the concept of faith based community organizing. FACE, an Oahu organization of 21 churches and 3 community organizations, has operated for the past 12 years working on successful campaigns like the renovation and repair of Kahili Valley Public Housing. This low-income development was in serious disrepair and the parishioners of Our Lady of the Mount Catholic Church in Kalihi Valley asked FACE to help them lobby for the funds to repair and renovate these housing units for the low-income residents – some are members of the Our Lady of the Mount. Thousands of dollars was received from the State government and many housing units were repaired and renovated.

Now, FACE is reaching out to Maui to help us build a similar organization here. Since that 2007 meeting, a group of church

representatives from the Catholic Church, The Episcopal Church, the United Christ of Christ, the Methodist Church, the Buddhist Temple, and others have been meeting to form a faith based community organization for Maui. As part of FACE's commitment to help us, they paid for a week's training in November 2007 for 4 Maui church representatives. I was blessed to be one of those representatives. And FACE has sent Rev. Stan Bain from Honolulu, who is now living among us, to build our organization. [5:30 p.m. Sat. Stan (I like that name) is among us today. Please stand and be recognized. He and I will be here after mass to answer any questions you may have.)

On May 3, 2008 at 8:30 a.m. at St. Anthony School, Mary Gonzales and Ana Garcia-Ashley, trainers with the Gamaliel Foundation, will be here to introduce us to the concepts of faith based community organizing. Gamaliel has successfully trained leaders for 60 faith based community organizations throughout the United States and South Africa in the past 30 years. Both Mary and Ana were my instructors at the November training and I can vouch for their passion, knowledge and training ability. Come and see on May 3rd.

What is God's saving plan?

God's saving plan is for us to love others especially the least fortunate among us. And now we have a vehicle with FACE to bring justice and dignity to our least fortunate brothers and sisters. Will we accept our Holy Father's challenge to put on the mind of Christ and be the light of the world and the salt of the earth?