21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Love feels best when it's a two-way street. You love someone; they love you back. You desire to do what they want; they desire to please you. Sometimes love is a one-way street. You love someone who does not feel the same way, or you resist the love that someone offers you. We often size up the directions of this street named "Love" either at the start of a relationship, or later, when we realize love made us blind; what we thought was forever was a whole lot shorter.

Love of God is supposed to be a two-way street. God always loves us, but we do not always love back. When we return God's love, it builds trust and a desire to get outside ourselves and extend love to the poor and afflicted.

Our responsorial today, Psalm 117, acknowledges the adverse tendency to keep God's love a one-way street: not to love God as he loves us. We may not like aspects of our life, we may doubt God is there, or think we have more important things to do. Sometimes we're fixated on how we want things to go when it appears God has other plans. We may feel sick, tired, betrayed, or otherwise just not ourselves, so we pursue other loves that do not satisfy. To accept God's love is to desire to do what God wants—truly to desire it, not to do it halfheartedly or begrudgingly. Psalm 117 describes God's virtue this way: "his merciful love has prevailed over us." God's love has finally worn us down. We had resisted it, but we've come to feel the joy of doing what God desires.

The psalm buffers this with another point: "the Lord's faithfulness endures forever." If you've had a love that first felt it was forever but ended up not, you may hesitate to love again. Not all love can be trusted. But the Lord's faithfulness, unlike that of many humans, endures forever.

We sang this psalm today because it opens with this line, "O praise the Lord, all you nations; acclaim him, all you peoples!" These words reach out to the entire world to say, "Whoever you are, praise the Lord." He is the unifying point. Let's get it together and praise him. In the gospel, Jesus prophesies that people will come from east, west, north and south to the kingdom of God. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord says, "I come to gather nations of every language…. They shall bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations as an offering to the Lord." Since the Lord has come for all the nations, all nations should praise the Lord.

The refrain we sang, "Go out to all the world and tell the good news," comes not from Psalm 117, but from the end of Mark's gospel, where Jesus charges his disciples to spread out and let everyone know his message.

Everyone needs this message. People all over the world lose hope over unemployment, illness, grades, performance, and love. Sixty years ago this December the Second Vatican Council released its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which opens with these words: "The joy and hope, the grief and anxiety of the people of this age, especially of the poor and afflicted, are also the joy and hope, grief and anxiety of the disciples of Christ." We know the good news the world needs. We'll share it effectively on every corner of our world if we move beyond our own anxiety, let the love of God prevail over us and return it on the two-way street.