

“God shows no partiality,” declares Peter in today’s first reading. Its difficult in today’s competitive world to envision such a love that does not favor the externals we admire. The fact is that most of us—children or adults—work very hard to earn partiality.

The advertising world constantly appeals to our desire to be the best, the strongest, the youngest looking, the skinniest, and "the-only-one-in-our-neighborhood-to-have-one" kind of person. Usually these things aren't goals in themselves, but we hope that if we are the best, the strongest, the possessor of exclusive items then perhaps we can impress others or attract them or have power over them.

We work hard at inequality: we stockpile material goods, degrees, titles and awards. We de-humanize persons into "connections" in our efforts to win success or approval. We don't want to be just like everyone else, we want to be better. We treat people unequally, showing partiality to those who can advance our career or prestige. WE choose sides and then we name some people as our enemies.

There are, of course, lots of things that can level out our attempts to make things unequal, some of levelers are quite frightful. There are natural disasters --fire, flood, earthquake-- which respect no distinctions. The folk all over the country have found out how easy nature can level out the distinctions we have erected. There are also people-made disasters-- wars and revolutions.

As awful as such things are they can also even us out is a good way; prod us to rediscover our common humanity and need for each other. Loss and tragedy are events that can strip away the facades of our own self-importance and often in the rubble of all that we thought we were, we really discover who we are.

There are other equalizers of people too, more gentle and more welcome. Friendships can help us down from the pedestals on to which we have climbed; love can see persons rather than possessions and love makes treasures of the time and warmth and the sharing of one's self rather than the things we have accumulated.

The real equalizer, of course, is God. The one to whom we turn in the incredible pain of disaster and loss; the god whom we find and cling to in those people who have reached out to us with friendship and seen us with the eyes of love. This is the God whom John tells us "has first loved us." This is the one who, no matter what we **have** or what we **have done**, loves us no more or no less than he loves everybody else.

He doesn't love us more if we have said the rosary every day, or memorized the fine print of church law; he doesn't love us more if we religiously recycle our trash and never use sexist language. We do those things because we find them important. In the best of circumstances we do those things because we have found them to be a human way of expressing love and respect.

But we aren't always at our best and so sometimes we scramble desperately to be superior to our neighbor because we have forgotten that it isn't what **we** accomplish but **God's** love for us that really gives us our dignity and our only lasting worth. He first loved us-- each of us and all of us-- and therefore we have no need to rob each other of dignity or self-worth in order to get some for ourselves. We need only to recognize it in ourselves and in each others before our desire to be better gets the best of us.

But if any of the practices that occupy us become important in themselves or done simply for our own motives then God's love will have a more difficult time penetrating our lives. God couldn't love us more, he won't love us less, but we accept his offer of love or reject it at the same time as we open or close our hearts to others.

I learned in the Military that camouflage fatigues and flying bullets have a great way of leveling out socio-economic levels and educational differences. One Vietnam veteran remarked that he had heard the gospel words, "There is no greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends," but had never realized how many people he could call friend. The North Vietnamese were "the enemy". They were things to hate, depersonalized even in name as "gooks." But one day after an attack this soldier told how he had to remove the contents of an enemy's pocket. There he found a wallet with photos in it: a wife and children, an elderly women who must have been his mother.

Suddenly this was not a "gook" but a dead human being, a dead husband and father and son. This too was a person loved impartially by the same God.

It's too bad we can't check each other's wallets before we name each other as enemies and choose sides or decide who is inferior. But we should look past the cash or credit cards, the country club membership cards and the food stamps. Look at the pictures and listen to the stories. We are all have husbands and wives, cherished friends, children, mothers who labored to bring us into the world. Our real worth comes from the photos and memories -- the faces in our lives, the people who love us as a reflection of the god who loves us first. And ultimately our value and dignity is the same for each of us, because we are loved by the same God.