

+Every time we left from a visit with my grandmother, we would see her in the front yard and inevitably one of us would say, “Nanny is starting to cry.” She was saying through her tears, “I love you. And it is love that causes the pain.” We are told in today’s gospel, “Jesus wept.”

God does not weep, for a spirit cannot shed tears. An animal does not weep; it is incapable of such emotion. Only a human can weep. Jesus wept, and in his manhood showed us he is one with us in our most vulnerable of human emotions.

Jesus is the model of what humanity is to be. Jesus' great mission, was not to be God, for he was God by nature. His mission was to be man, to take upon himself our flesh and to represent to us, in the purest possible way, what it really is to be a human being.

He was not a Greek deity floating on a cloud. No, he was a carpenter, who loved flowers and little children, who talked about sowing seed and buying some sparrows for a penny. He entered as a fetus into the womb of his mother and dwelt there for nine months. At the end of his life, he died and was placed into a tomb.

Part of what Jesus showed us about the human experience was the importance of openness and vulnerability. Jesus taught us this – we have to risk pain and vulnerability in order to love. We can never experience the fullness of love without doing so.

His detractors have no love in them for they are unwilling to let the walls down, to expose their hearts to God’s love. People like this are always unpleasant and often die unloved.

That’s not to say Jesus was a weepy sentimentalist or some kind of whimp.

This is the one who would face down a hostile crowd and walk courageously through the very middle of them. This one who was, with a whip and commanding words, cleared a temple of moneychangers.

This one allowed himself to be beaten and crowned with thorns and spat upon and still, when he was brought before a Roman governor, could draw from the lips of that governor these words: "Behold, the man!" Is this weakness? No, that’s love.

He confronted people with the truth, but out of love. He calls us to be that authentic person God gave life to.

Jesus never masked himself. There was no duplicity in him. When his heart hurt, he let it show. (Along with when he was happy or angry, he let it show.) He had no secrets nor should we.

But some people will never do that. They look upon such vulnerability as a sign of weakness.

+Do you remember Gayle Sayers and Brian Piccolo, the star backs for the Chicago Bears? One was a black man; one was a white man. They created quite a sensation back in the days that they were, because they were the first to room together in professional football.

Reporters used to ask them about that all the time, and they would always tease one another in their answers.

\*A reporter would say, "Do you mind living with him?" and Piccolo would answer, "Not if he doesn't use the bathroom."

\*Or a reporter would say, "What do you two fellows talk about?" and Sayers would respond, "Oh, just the usual racist talk."

They had a lot of kidding remarks they made toward one another, but there was a deep, deep affection between them.

Then Brian Piccolo was cut down with cancer and began to spend more time in the hospital than he did on the football field. The two men had planned to go with their wives to New York to the Professional Football Writers Association banquet, where Sayers was to be presented the George S. Halas Award as the most courageous professional football player in that year. But Piccolo, because of the oncoming advance of the disease, was unable to go.

When the moment came for Gayle Sayers to receive the award, this star running back stepped to the microphone and with the tears unashamedly rolling down his cheeks said, "You flatter me by giving me this award. But I tell you here and now that I accept it for Brian Piccolo.

Brian Piccolo is the man of courage who should receive the award. I love Brian Piccolo, and I'd like you to love him, too. Tonight when you hit your knees, please ask God to love him." A strong man saying of another strong man, "I love Brian," and weeping as he said it. But is that weakness?

+Golda Meir perhaps summed it best: "I've always felt sorry for people afraid of feeling, who are unable to weep with their whole hearts. Because these do not do this, because they do not know how to weep, they do not know how to laugh, either."

However, Jesus did not weep for Lazarus. He knew that he could call Lazarus back at will. The passage is very specific; it says that when Jesus heard their cries of lamentation, he was troubled and he wept.

In other words, Jesus wept because of the sorrow and the brokenness that he saw in that human experience. He reached out and put his arms about us in compassion and tenderness.

Jesus says to all of us, "Follow me." To follow is to risk as he risks, to love as he loved.

Yes, we will experience pain in doing so, but through it we will know the fullness of joy and what it means to love.

Jesus wept. And that puts into my heart incomparable hope when I am able to do so -- to love as he loves and thus experience the love beyond the tears – the hope of eternal life where there are no more tears, but only love.

No more tears Nanny, only love.