

## Sixth Sunday of Easter, Cycle B

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

1 John 4:7-10

John 15:9-17

There are multiple kinds of love that we can experience in this life: puppy love, romantic love, platonic love, brotherly and sisterly love, uxorial love, paternal love, and on Mothers' Day we are especially mindful of maternal love. Many stories and memories will be conjured up today, of the sacrifices mothers made for their children's growth, safety and wellbeing. The source of all love, of course, is divine love, Trinitarian love. God who is love could not contain that love within the Trinitarian unity. It burst forth into a creation, every part of which God pronounced very good. God even made creatures in his own image and likeness. The whole of creation is meant to mirror and give glory to all the perfections in the creator: unity, beauty, truth, goodness, holiness, power and majesty.

We heard St. John tell us plainly that God is love. Unless you know loving and being loved experientially, you cannot know God, he says. Jesus tells that that love involves keeping the commandments. Keeping or guarding the divine instructions is more than acknowledging God as a lawgiver and we as being law-bound to him. It is about mutual responsibilities in a covenant relationship. To those who live it faithfully Jesus promises to give joy along with intimate knowledge of the Father's plan for their lasting wellbeing and the consummation of his creation.

The covenant relationship becomes even more intimate when Jesus speaks of God adopting us, making us brothers and sisters to him, who is the beloved Son. Although Jesus says that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends, surely his love is greater than that. He laid down his life for us while we were his enemies caught up in our rebellious sinfulness.

When Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, he responded, quoting from the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus, "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength;*" and he added, "*you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" This invitation, revealed as God's desire, has for millennia been remembered and striven for, an old commandment.

John in his first letter writes: "Dearly Beloved, it is no new commandment that I write to you, but an old one which you had from the start." Then he has a second thought, "*the commandment I write to you is new.*" What makes it new is the incarnation of the Son of God who is the new link between God's love for us and our love for God. Obviously it all begins with God, who is absolute love. The divine love flows to us now through Jesus. Jesus said, as the father has loved me, so I love you. As I love you so you must love one another. How did the Father show his love for his Son? At Jesus' baptism and at his transfiguration the voice from heaven attested: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleasing, hear him."

We know that God "*so loved the world that he gave his **only Son** that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life*". One may ask what kind of paternal love is this that a father would send his only Son on a mission to suffer such humiliation and excruciating pain? Certainly the Son showed his love for the Father by his obedience; for, "*He emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men.... It was thus that he humbled himself obediently accepting even death, death on a cross*". Still we see that God showed his love for his Son by his rising from the dead, returning as a dutiful son, and clothing the human nature he had assumed with divine glory.

Jesus' self-emptying, suffering and death could add nothing to his own holiness and perfect union of will with the One who Sent Him. So it had another purpose. He did it for us, to obtain the forgiveness of our sin, to set us free from slavery to Satan's dominion, and to reveal to us God's plan for a new creation where his chosen ones would share in his glorified life.

We have the evidence that the Father loves the Son and that his Son, Jesus, loves us. Now the question is how do we love one another in a similar way? In his sermon on the mount Jesus reinterprets another Old Testament version of the second part of the greatest commandment. It reads, *"love your countryman but hate your enemy"*. Jesus says, Not so. You must love your enemies. *"Bless those who curse you and pray for those who maltreat you."* Turn the other cheek and so on. He asks more than the Golden Rule, more than we are capable of by ourselves.

But I do not need to spell out what we must do to love one another. Just read the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus will tell you what constitutes beatitude, how to deal with anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and rash judgments, the proper intentions and ways of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, where to find true treasures, and finally on what rock to build your house so that it can withstand the assaults of fallen human existence.

Fr. Michael commented at Friday's mass, that in the end we cannot really be ordered or commanded to love. Love cannot be bought. It cannot even be earned. It is a free gift of one's self for the real good of another without regard to reward for oneself. In the vocation prayer at the end of Mass, we say that God calls **all** who believe in him to grow in that perfect love which casts out all fear. We can only do it by following the example of Jesus, his Son. Let us continue to strive for that goal so that we may bear the fruits of his Spirit: love, joy peace, patience endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness and chastity. (Galatians 5) In this way we will fulfill our mission to live an example of the Gospel that will give glory to God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, who live and reign forever and ever. AMEN

Fr. Christopher Wyvill