

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER May 10, 2015

In a morning office reading this past week we heard St. Augustine conclude his sermon with the well-known statement, Love and do what you will. Love makes the world go around. Love stories abound in world literature, drama, cinema and real life. Think of Abelard and Eloise, Romeo and Juliet, Armand and Camille in LA TRAVIATA, Oliver and Jenny in Segal's LOVE STORY, or Tony and Maria in Bernstein's WESTSIDE STORY. I am sure you could name a hundred others.

Why are we moved to tears or cheers when we read, hear or see these stories dramatized? They are stories of triumphs and tragedies, separation and reunion, infidelity and faithfulness, betrayal and forgiveness. Fairy tales often ended with, 'They lived happily ever after.' How rare that is human lifetime. Circumstances beyond our control can cause a permanent separation of loved ones, and the death of one or both has the final say. Or does it? The bride in the Song of Songs says, 'Stern as death is love, relentless as the nether world is devotion.... Deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away. Were one to offer all he owns to purchase love, he would be roundly mocked.'

In the scriptures these last days of the Easter Season, Jesus and John are telling us about the greatest love story there is. This one is not just between man and woman, man and man, woman and woman, me and my pet. God is truth, beauty and goodness. Above all, God is love. Love originates in God and is diffusive of itself into all his works. If we are made in God's image, then we are made for love. By willingly becoming one like us, Jesus, the Son of God, demonstrated how love is lived to perfection. While we were still dead in our sins, the Son of God died for us, laying down his life for his enemies, to turn us into his friends. One of our hymns express it beautifully:

"My song is of love unknown, my Savior's love to me, love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be. O who am I that for my sake my Lord should take frail flesh and die? Here might I stay and sing, no story so divine: never was love, dear King, never was grief like thine. This is my friend, in whose sweet praise I all my days could gladly spend."

Jesus tells us, As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Then he adds that as I have loved you, you must love one another. Jesus took on our humanity and died for us on the cross in obedience to the Father's will. St. Paul says we should respond to God's love so demonstrated for us with an obedient love in imitation of his Son. Love is not some romantic dreamy, rose-colored view of life. We prove we love God by two ways as we heard from John, one, by keeping his commandments, and two, by loving our brothers and sisters, even those who disrespect us or persecute us.

To assist us in doing what seems impossible to fallen human nature, Jesus in his glorified humanity and the Father have poured their own Spirit into our hearts to empower us to love in God-like ways. With that divine aid we are given works to do. Jesus said I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain.

What are these fruits we are to bear that will last?

Micah said it simply: "You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God."

That is fleshed out in the sermon on the Mount, elsewhere in the gospel and in the lives of the saints with this::

1. Render to God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. God first of all deserves our homage, rightful worship and obedience.
2. Strive to live at peace with everyone.
3. Speak the truth in love, even in tough love.
4. Forgive offenses and seek forgiveness when having offended another.
5. Be welcoming to the immigrant, the refugee, and to the stranger who may be an angel.
6. Have compassion on the poor, the sick, and the lonely.
7. Like St. Peter in Cornelius' house, be open to where the Spirit is alive in those of other persuasions.
8. Put on the mind of St. Teresa of Calcutta and look for the face of Jesus in the poorest of the poor.

That is our homework and a formidable project. God is patient while he waits for us to grow in the imitation of Christ. It is possible as St. Benedict say at the conclusion of the Prologue to the Rule:

**As we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.**

But there is a condition: **Never swerving from his instructions, ...but faithfully observing his teaching ... until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom. AMEN.**