

30<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF YEAR A Oct. 25, 2020

When I was a junior in high school, I was chosen to speak at the Junior-senior annual banquet. My English teacher helped me to find a topic or theme for the speech. Its title was 'Love Makes the World go Around'. I do not remember what I said. I doubt anybody else did. I got through it somehow without script or notes.

Jesus tells his questioners the greatest commandment is love, three times over: Love of God, love of neighbor and love of one's self. Now God is omnipotent, all knowing, eternal, dwells in light inaccessible, utterly ungraspable with our intellect. To believe that such a God exists can stir up fearsome awe, cause us to offer sacrifice, offer worship, in the hope of earning divine benevolence. How can one love the owner of such awesome majesty, might and power? It is possible for those who believe in the revelation of his love for us through the Son of God becoming man. He told us, "As the father loves me so I also love you. Remain in my love. .... This is my commandment: love one another as I love you." (Jn. 15: 9-12)

Let's start with ourselves. If you do not love yourself, can you really love your neighbor in the right way? Why are young people mutilating their bodies that are made to be temples of the Holy Spirit? Why is it that more people, especially younger people are committing suicide in our times? Jeremiah had a dismal view of that inner struggle we experience. The prophet declared "The heart is more deceitful than all else. And is desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17: 9=10) We have a dark side as well as a good side. It is hard to love the dark side. St. Paul in Romans describes the wretched state of our fallen human nature. **"The willing is ready..., but doing the good is not. For I do not do the good that I want but I do the evil that I do not want. ... I take delight in the law of God in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind. ... Miserable one that I am, who will deliver me from this mortal body? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." ... The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death.**" (7: vs 19 and following)  
When we accept that gratuitous gift, we can accept our new self and be more loveable.

Love your neighbor. Now who is my neighbor? Jesus gave us an answer in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Our relationships with other persons are in multilayered. C.S. Lewis described it in his book, *The Four Loves*. He used the Greek names Storge, Philia, Eros, and Agape. They can be translated as affection, friendship, romantic love with its sexual component, and charity.

First affection: the Greek word means mainly loyalty within familial relationships: parents for their children, siblings for one another, for aunts and uncles, grandparents and other generational connections. For a small child it is a need-love from its parents or guardians. Parents should show a gift-love to their children. Fr. Flanagan's Boys Town has an iconic example of it with a boy arriving at the door carrying a young boy on his shoulders. "He ain't heavy, Father. He's m' brother." How sad it is when divisions occur between family members that sometimes last for years or a lifetime.

The second kind of love, philia, is the friendship which goes beyond family connections. Its deepest level is an intimate relationship of two who share like values and vision. Some examples I can think of are David and Jonathan, son of king Saul. Saints like St. Clare and St. Agnes of Prague; St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal. Card. St. John Henry Newman wanted to be buried in a shared grave with Ambrose St John. It was his express wish – of his friend Ambrose he wrote: "From the first he loved me with an intensity of love, which was unaccountable". Committed friendship in life had been for them a foretaste of communion in heaven. Intimate chaste love is possible with the help of the grace of God.

I heard a country comedian speaking about the different kinds of love. He said that there is parental love, fraternal love, uxorial love, romantic love, platonic love, puppy love, and then there is l...o...v...e!" That is Eros, with its sexual content. God said, it is not good for man to be alone. He made him a helpmate. In their union the two become one flesh, to be fruitful and multiply. We know from the lives of many couples how difficult it is to remain faithful to one partner for life. Yet it can be done with the blessing and the support of others who have lived through tough times together. Eros is not just romantic love. It involves sacrifices and surrender of self-interests for the good of the partner and their union.

Agape, the fourth is the highest form of love. Its source comes from God loving us unconditionally, we whom he made in his image. Our response to knowing we are so loved is to strive to love God and one another unconditionally. It is love that is totally self-emptying for the good of others, for their earthly good and eternal good. Edifying examples of this kind of love response are the martyr saints. Love for life did not deter them from accepting death. Doing so they witnessed to the gospel truth of God's plan for the salvation of all. "God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish, but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." (Jn. 3:16) So it is possible with the help of God's grace and God's own Spirit poured into our hearts to grow in that Christ-like love.

Jesus has left us the memorial of his love for us that he showed us in his suffering, passion, death and resurrection while we were still sinners. As we return to the altar we will consecrate the offered bread and wine with the invocation of the Holy Spirit and repeat his words, "This is my body..., this is my blood.... Do this in remembrance of me." By participating in such a gift of love, let us give him with the Father and Holy Spirit our praise, thanksgiving and loving obedience now and forever. AMEN