How much Love is enough?

During Lent, we are called to prayer, fasting and almsgiving in order to make our preparation for Easter complete. But what is it really designed to do? Some might say that it is meant to make us feel uncomfortable so that we can join in Jesus' suffering. Or, by giving of ourselves to more prayer time, we make some effort to make a closer connection with Christ. Then by almsgiving we are giving of our treasure to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, care for the sick and those imprisoned and bury the dead. Yes, it is perhaps with the intent of living out the corporal works of mercy. Although all these explanations may be part of the reasons we do this, is that really enough to get us to the place where Jesus intends us to be?

Lent is a good time to get back on track and reorder our priorities. The call to prayer, fasting and almsgiving will certainly help us to change our focus and grow closer to the Lord. But this yearly observance can also help us in other ways. To purge us of false idols. To teach us about sacrifice. To act as penance to conform our lives to Christ. And most of all, to teach us how to love.

Jesus' whole Gospel message was about love. It was his “greatest commandment.” And according to today's Gospel reading it was the reason that God gave us his only son. It is because of that love we will be saved.

Throughout the year, but especially at this time, we are reminded of God's tremendous love for us. And that through his ultimate demonstration of Love, his death and resurrection, we too will enjoy eternal life. We are also reminded of our responsibility as Christians to put that faith into action. If we truly believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, then we need to live our lives as Jesus commanded us to do. We need to love one another. That means that we need to take care of the needs of our brothers and sisters not just in works of charity but by means of social justice. We must work as a community to resolve the root causes of social problems such as poverty, hunger, homelessness, sickness and crime. Our love must extend to everyone without being judgmental or vindictive.

Our faith calls not only for prayer, fasting and almsgiving but for action. We are living in trying times. Conflict is rampant. People are suffering throughout the world, even in our own back yards. Hatred, racism, homelessness, unemployment, family violence are just a few of the problems that exist. Each of us needs to become aware of what is going on in our own parish and our own city and begin to assess how we can put our love into action.

It may mean that during lent, we become more patient and tolerant of those who hold different points of view than we do. It may mean that we display more understanding to those who are suffering and are in need of mercy.

We often expect mercy and forgiveness to come to us. But Jesus taught us to devote ourselves to the ones we love. First and foremost, we must devote ourselves to Him. That love for God should fill us with love for others and motivate us to take action when action is necessary.

The greatest act of love is to give up one’s life for those we love. Jesus gave it all. How much are we willing and able to give? Will it ever be enough?

- Deacon Victor Valenzuela