

Aging Gracefully during the Pandemic

Session 4: Love

Opening Prayer

Pray the following words aloud together:

“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you,
ask for whatever you wish,
and it will be done for you.

“My Father is glorified by this,
that you bear much fruit
and become my disciples.

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you;
abide in my love.

“If you keep my commandments,
you will abide in my love,
just as I have kept my Father’s commandments
and abide in his love.

“I have said these things to you
so that my joy may be in you,
and that your joy may be complete.”

Amen

(John 15: 7-9)

Love Never Fails

Read the talking points throughout this process aloud. Simply have each participant read one paragraph at a time to the whole group, continuing around the circle.

- Love is not on lockdown. Love does not shelter in place, and it has not been canceled. While it may take some extra creativity to express it safely today, our faith implores us to continue to make love known.
- Pope Francis calls the writings in Scripture a “love letter from God.” The New Testament tells us that love is from God, and that God is love. John’s Gospel, which has been called the Gospel of Love, proclaims that God loved our world so much that he sent his only Son so that we who believe in him may have eternal life.
- Later, the writer of 1 John says that although no one has ever seen God, God’s love has been shown to us through Jesus. Because God loved us, we in turn show love for one another. When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, he responded: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. “(Mt. 22, 37-39)
- Jesus taught his disciples that they should model their love for each other after the great love that he had shown to them. Before he died, he also told them, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn. 15:13)
- We are told that people recognized the early Christians by the way they loved one another. They attracted people to them by their radical way of sharing with each other so that no one was in need. Their joyful spirit of fellowship as they broke bread together and continued to teach and

preach in Jesus' name interested other people who wanted to live like them.

- **Jesus, the lover of souls.** St. John Henry Newman called Jesus the lover, the person who showed us the divine way of giving love. He was the epitome of graceful giving, of healing, inspiring, teaching, encouraging, serving, and sacrificing. In the early years, Jesus showed us the value of family closeness, the dignity of hard work, living close to nature, being a good neigh-

bor, and devoutly following his religious beliefs. He showed us how to be generous, compassionate, and caring, and how to love children, care for elders, and bring healing to the sick and dying.

- Then Jesus showed us how to sacrifice our lives for others. He challenged his disciples to love each other the same way that he loved them, and predicted that the way all people would recognize them was through their love for one another.

Reflection Questions

① What is your favorite Scripture passage that tells you about love?

② Give an example of someone who you have seen modeling God's love for us or Jesus' love for others.

Love in Times of Trouble

- In many religions there is a divine triangle: God, self, and neighbor. As Christians, Jesus taught us to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Unfortunately, we know that our neighbors face racism and prejudice. Attacks against people of color, Muslims, Jews, migrants, gays, lesbians, and transgender people have become more common. During the pandemic, there has been a rise of racism against people of Chinese descent. There is a proliferation of hate groups and we have sorted ourselves into clans of like-minded individuals.
- The need for dialogue and heart-felt listening is more urgent than ever. With all of the divisiveness in our society, what if, as Christians, we claim Jesus' teachings as our mottoes to chalk on our sidewalks, hang from our windows, or carry at protests or rallies? "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34) or "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44) would be wonderful starting points for a more loving dialogue.
- There are many stories of heroic, loving actions happening during this pandemic. Even some television ads proclaim: "We are all in this togeth-

er." Courageous doctors and nurses work long shifts, risking their lives while expressing concern for their families at home. Patients of every age, political affiliation, race, and income level are being treated with tenderness and care. Ambulance drivers, police and firefighters, pharmacists, food suppliers, cashiers, delivery people, mail carriers, and hosts of others are demonstrating unconditional love to those in need. Suddenly we have all become neighbors.

- There are so many stories about those who work 12-hour shifts or live apart from their families so as to take care of their neighbors. Many are coming to see that we have "near" and "far" neighbors, and that when Jesus called us to love our neighbors as ourselves, he was calling us to love others who live beyond our neighborhoods. Near Philadelphia, 40 factory employees confined themselves for 28 days in their plant, making equipment for hospitals. Their actions were a form of love for "far" neighbors who they would never meet. Family members expressed their love and solidarity by driving by tooting horns and cheering for the generous workers.

- **Love for self.** Does it seem strange to talk about self-love in this time of pandemic? Perhaps, yet Jesus reminds us we must love ourselves as well as our neighbors. A parent or caregiver who works tirelessly for others may be generous, but won't be helpful to anyone if he or she burns out or gets sick. Even Jesus regularly took time away by himself so that he could re-charge and come back to his ministry refreshed. If Jesus needed rest from his teaching and healing work, certainly we all deserve that too.
- Loving ourselves includes taking the rest that we need, eating well, exercising, and making time for reflection and prayer. Nourishing ourselves in this way is not selfishness; it is self-care, or better yet, self-love. It is essential if we are to be able to reach out and care for others.
- As elders, we can focus on being loving and compassionate to all those around us, including ourselves and those we may be sheltering in place

with 24/7. As many people have recognized by now, sometimes it is easier to feel compassion for the stranger a hemisphere away than to be compassionate to the one you are living with who leaves dirty dishes on the counter or turns the television up too loud. We may need to work harder at extending loving-kindness to those closest to us.

- In these difficult days, we can call or write to friends and family. This may be the time to get in touch with someone who is grieving. Grief is a reminder of the depth of our love. It can be a time to discuss the love we both shared for the deceased. How will we best use this time that is given to us?
- **Love and compassion.** In these stressful days, we see much suffering around the world, in hospitals, families, and nursing homes. We have so many opportunities to practice loving God, ourselves, and others the way that Jesus loved us.

Reflection Questions

- ① How can you concretely express your love of God by loving neighbors in this time?
- ② Are there certain "neighbors," near or far, who you have difficulty loving? How so?

- ③ What do you do to love yourself? Is there anything else God might be inviting you to do now to better love yourself so that you can continue to love others?

Closing Prayer

Pray the following words aloud together:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace

Help us to speak about others
as our brothers and sisters.

May your words be seeds of goodness for the world:

Where there is shouting, let us practice listening.
Where there is exclusion, let us offer solidarity.

Where there is prejudice, let us awaken trust.

Where there is hostility, let us bring respect.

Where there is falsehood, let us bring truth.

Amen.

(Inspired by Pope Francis,
World Communications Day, 2018)

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