

Love is the Meaning

3rd Sunday of Easter (Year C)

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In you remember back to your teenage years, one of the constant questions we asked other people (or better yet pestered them with) was: 'Do you love me?' In our earlier years of life, that was the question upon which our entire life depended upon. Knowing that we were loved felt so good.

In today's Gospel, Jesus almost sounds like a teenager. He asks his friend Simon Peter that same question three times: 'Do you love me, do you love me, do you love me?' As we heard, by the third time, Peter is a bit frustrated. He says, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." In other words, 'yes, I love you, so quit trying to make me feel guilty.' We almost feel annoyed at Jesus for Peter.

The reason that Jesus asked Peter this question three times, though, is quite significant. Unlike a teenager, it was not because he was a needy person. He was not clingy or insecure with himself. The real reason is that Jesus wanted to make it absolutely clear to Peter (and also to us!) that love is the basis for a relationship with God. Love, whether it is anything from friendship to deep intimacy, is of God.

The mystics are the ones who traditionally have understood this the best. Mystics go so far beyond the mere observance of the rules and regulations of religion. Love alone is what motivates them. As the 14th century mystic Julian of Norwich wrote,

Know it well, love is the meaning.
Who reveals this to you? Love.
What does he reveal? Love. Why? For Love.
Remain in this and you will know more of the same.

(Showings 86:11-17.379)

Unfortunately, the mystics have always been in the minority. For most of us, we are not motivated by love of God, but by fear of punishment. Just think of all the 'Acts of Contrition' we memorized as children: 'I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments,' I pray 'to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin,' and 'I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell.' This is not yet a religion of love.

Another good example of people who saw love as their motivation is the early followers of Jesus as found in the *Acts of the Apostles* in our First Reading. The governing bodies at the time forbade them, under strict orders, to teach about Jesus. Their response was very courageous: "we must obey God rather than men." When they were dismissed and reminded once again not to teach about Jesus, they left "rejoicing that they have been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name." That is a religion of deep sacrificial love.

Love is the meaning of a relationship with God.

"Do you love me?" - Jesus

Throughout the course of our lives, Jesus will ask us this question in a thousand different ways. Let us pray that we may make everything about love so that each and every time, we can answer like Simon Peter, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you...Yes, Lord, you know that I love you...Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you."