

Love Them Well

4th Sunday in Lent

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“If we are going to love others at all, we must make up our minds to love them well. Otherwise our love is a delusion.” (*No Man is An Island*, 6) These words come from the 20th century Trappist monk and spiritual author Thomas Merton.

In today’s famous Gospel passage of John 3:16, we hear about the great love of God: ‘for God so loved the world.’ Love was the reason for the creation of the world in the first place. Love was the reason that God sent Jesus Christ into the world in the fullness of time. Love was the reason that Jesus Christ was lifted up from the earth and died upon the cross on Good Friday. Love was the reason for the resurrection on Easter Sunday. Love is the reason for our existence each and every day.

Too often, as human beings, we do not love well. Our love is partial. Most of the time, we only love parts of people, namely the parts that are easy to get along with, the parts that overlap with our own outlooks on life, the parts we can control, or the parts we consider worthy. This is not really love, though, because people do not exist in parts; people only exist in wholeness.

Loving someone well requires a complete acceptance of the whole person for who they are. This includes the good and the bad, the parts we like and the parts we dislike, the parts we agree with and the parts we disagree with, the parts we understand and the parts we do

not understand. It is an openness to that person without trying to change them.

At first sight, this understanding of love may actually upset us. We might say, 'isn't this being too accepting or too permissive? Isn't my job to tell others how and why they are wrong? Don't we have the truth?' The reply is very simple and it comes from the second reading today to the Ephesians: 'God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ.' If God has loved us, even when we have been sinful, wrong, or dead in our transgressions, we can surely still love others regardless of our assessment of them at this moment. In fact, our constant love could be that which brings them to life, or even for some, keeps them in life.

When dealing with people, we are called to love them as a whole person.

Do I love people or just parts or aspects of people?

Dissecting, judging, or evaluating a person's every move into what we approve of and disapprove of and then only loving the parts we like is not loving that person. This is a delusion of love that leaves open the pathway of hatred. As Christians, let us work on our love, for "if we are going to love others at all, we must make up our minds to love them well."