

Homily - Easter 5 - Year C - May 19, 2019

The other day in preparing for this homily I did a little surfing on the internet. Google told me that there were 4,260,000,000 hits for the word love. Of that astronomical number, there were 762,000,000 that also referenced Jesus. iTunes almost came to a screeching halt as I asked how many songs and albums contained the word love...and that was only in titles. Then, onto Amazon. It had 351,774 results, but at that point I got tired of counting. No matter in what stage of maturity any one of us may be, we can remember that love formed part of our musical knowledge, love stories have been the fodder of many magazines, bookstore sections are devoted to love, either actual, romanticized, or fantasized, and on occasion the word is used to express the relationship of one person with another, hoping that the other responds in a reciprocal manner.

Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous; love is not ill-mannered; love does not keep a record of wrong; love never gives up. You have probably hear this description of love at a wedding, a long litany of the characteristics of love. The reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians is often chosen at weddings because those words reflect the attitude of the couple on embarking on their lives as husband and wife, a commitment of life and love.

However, those words of Paul just like the words of Jesus in today's gospel are not meant just for married couples. Jesus addresses his exhortation to those in front of him, but he means his words for all of his followers, then and now: I give you a new commandment. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. All will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

The romantic love that brings a man and woman together in marriage is a human reality, one which can exist even without the exhortations of Jesus. However, as followers of Jesus, we believe that the marriage bond of love is one of the highest examples of Christ's commandment to love, an example that is unique between the husband and wife.

But Jesus is clear in saying that his statement is not just for husbands and wives, parents and children, rather he is giving a commandment, not a suggestion, not a hope, but a commandment that his followers love one another.

Likewise Jesus did spell out what shape this love should take. Love one another as I have loved you. Jesus' love for others extended beyond those who loved him. On the cross he forgave the repentant thief; he went after the lost sinners such as Zaccheus; he invited those who were hungry and thirsty to come to him. Jesus seldom waited for others to come to him; he went to them to extend his love and care without, of course, ever forcing.

Where are we in all of this? One day two friends were chatting. One said to the other: "My family knows that I love them. Why there's nothing I wouldn't do for them, and there's nothing they wouldn't do for me." Smiling, his friend responded: "That's the trouble....You end up doing nothing for each other."

Love can truly transform others. Love can turn a sinner into a saint. Loved turned a beast into a prince, so the story goes. No one needs love more than someone who does not deserve it. If we wait for people to become loveable before we love them, we are going to wait a very long time. In the process of loving others, they become loved. Jesus called his commandment new precisely because he wanted us to love even the unloveable.

Love impelled those early disciples that we read about in the Acts of the Apostles to endure even hardship to spread the message and the love of Christ into the world. It is God's love for us that will shape us into faithful disciples as we go about loving others.

When humanity discovered fire, the world was changed forever. So, too, when we discover the power of love and implement that power, our world will be transformed. A spiritual author put it this way: "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for the second time in the history of the world, man will discover fire and the world will be transformed." Don't wait for humanity to master the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity. Do it now.