

A reading from the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts.

But I shall show you a still more excellent way.

If I speak in human and angelic tongues

but do not have love,

I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal.

And if I have the gift of prophecy

and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge;

if I have all faith so as to move mountains,

but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give away everything I own,

and if I hand my body over so that I may boast

but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind.

It is not jealous, is not pompous,

it is not inflated, it is not rude,

it does not seek its own interests,

it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing

but rejoices with the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things,

hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails.

The Word of the Lord. *R. Thanks be to God*

Commentary

This passage is known as a hymn of love. It is popular for Catholics and other Christians, and it tugs at the heartstrings of engaged couples as soon as they glance over the options. Most will not initially realize that St. Paul is not talking directly to husbands and wives. He is addressing many concerns within Corinth’s Christian community and is seeking to strengthen their overall unity. The community appears to have lost some of the vision of Gospel living. Thus, the apostle offers these thoughts.

This bold Christian view of love demonstrates clearly that it cannot be reduced to a romantic emotion. Love looks like something. Here, St. Paul describes it with poetic detail. He tells what love is – patient, kind, enduring– as well as what it is not – jealous, pompous, inflated, rude, quick-tempered. The reading also foretells what happens when love is absent. Without it, lives and relationships are like a noisy gong. We can accumulate things, be showered with gifts, and even give things away, yet without love, all is worthless. Really, what Paul is describing, is a love that looks like Christ, the one who is Love incarnate.