

Homily for the seventh Sunday of Easter, May 16, 2021

Several years ago the recently declared saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta was invited to speak in communist China. Over the course of many years, the atheistic regime harassed, arrested, tortured and even murdered Christians. As usual, wherever Mother turned up, the media soon followed. While in China she was asked by a reporter a rather pointed question, "And what is a communist to you?" without hesitation, she replied, "A communist is a child of God, my brother and sister". And nobody had another word to say. Nobody! There was stunned silence.

The next day, all the Communist newspapers quoted her. "A communist is a child of God".

She, of course, was right. Christians are called to be inclusive and their love for others must be unconditional. He loves because God loves us. Love finds its origin in God and love leads to God. Loving others is the distinctive mark of the Christian. In today's epistle from the First letter of John, the evangelist writes, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another".

In the writings of the apostle John, he uses three terms to describe God: light, life and charity. These are the three things everyone needs and wants more than anything else. Their opposites---- falsehood, death and hate--- are the three worst things in the world. Everyone wants to avoid them.

When I was a first year college student, a freshman, many years ago, I was required to read a book by the famous pioneer of psychoanalysis, Dr. Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and its discontents". A man generally hostile to religion, Freud came to the conclusion that not all men were worthy of love. Indeed, he offered his opinion that by loving the unlovable, we may be doing a disservice to the human family.

The challenge for the Christian is to look upon another person from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend. Let me return to today's epistle once more. "If we love one another, God remains in us and love is brought to perfection in us".

Some of you may recall the infamous Serial killer known as the "Son of Sam", who was responsible for the murders of many young adults in New York City during the 1970's. His true name: David Berkowitz. He was eventually arrested, put on trial, and convicted for his heinous crimes. He is now serving a life sentence in prison.

One Sunday morning he wandered into a Protestant worship service and listened attentively to the preacher's words. That day he spoke of God's love, mercy and forgiveness. One does not earn God's love. God's love is gratuitous and is never withdrawn from his creation. Having convinced himself that he had lost God's love forever due to his horrific crimes, he warily approached the minister. "Do I understand you to mean that God could even be merciful to me, a cold hearted killer? The minister replied in the affirmative.

A short time later, he embraced Christ and was eventually baptized. We may withhold our love for others, but God does not.. God is Love!

Perhaps you are familiar with one of my favorite hymns, "Where charity and Love Prevail". The words are illuminating, enchanting;

"Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found. Brought here together by Christ's love, by love are we thus bound".

Love is at the center of our Christian vocation. Unfortunately, "love" has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words.

If we wish to understand and appreciate "love" all that is necessary is to turn to Christ, who loved us to the bitter end of his life. He shows us the way.