



Dear Friends in Christ:

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTORAL COORDINATOR

*May Christ's peace, joy and hope be with you all!*

Some words are so overused in our language that we often forget their meaning or at least the depth of meaning behind a word. One of those words is *love*. For Christian disciples, the ultimate love of course is the love of God manifested in Jesus. Christian love is not the same as alternative present day understandings. For us, we're to love like Christ loves and according to His definition, not our own. At the Last Supper, Jesus clarified His understanding. Jesus said, "Love one another, just as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

The insight for us in understanding what love is all about for followers of Jesus is that we are to imitate Jesus in modeling what love actually means. The first level of understanding of this kind of love is that it is given freely, undeserved, and unearned. God's love for us isn't given as some kind of reward for our faithfulness. The Incarnation of God the Father in Jesus wasn't accomplished because we merited God's love. God loved and loves us despite our weaknesses, our sinfulness, and our failures. St. Paul writes, "But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

God takes the initiative. God loves us first, even though by our standards it would seem that we don't deserve His love. This gift of God's love is revealed consistently throughout the life of Jesus. He constantly reaches out to sinners, strangers, and those deemed unclean and/or unworthy of inclusion into the community. Throughout his life, God reveals through Jesus the depth of His love for humanity. St. Paul prays, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17-19).

Jesus transcends what we might warrant. As His disciples, we're compelled to practice the same kind of love in the world in which we live. The great challenge before us is to go beyond what people rate in our relationships with them. If others have hurt us, Jesus' witness demands of us who follow Him that we extend the same kind of selfless gift of forgiveness on their behalf. It may make no economic sense, and it lacks the kind of *quid pro quo* approach that our culture suggests: "if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." In a mysterious way this teaching about the gratuity of God's love is reflected in the Eucharist. Jesus gives His entire self to us, body and soul—His humanity and His divinity—in what looks like anything but God's loving presence. Yet God extends his mercy and love to us.

When we come to Mass, we must take the time to recollect ourselves and take seriously what we are about to receive – the gift of God's love freely given to us through His loving and merciful presence. In receiving His incredible gift, we must allow ourselves to be transformed so that we might be signs of God's love in the world, just as Jesus was and is today through us.

In God's great love, hope, and mercy,

*Deacon Jim*