

“As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Words from our Gospel today from the 13th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

It’s pretty amazing how quickly Christianity spread out of the city of Jerusalem and made its way north through Syria, through all of Turkey, over through Greece and into Rome in a span of perhaps 40 years despite all the odds stacked against it. This happened without cell phones and social media. Unless you were in the Roman army, you likely did not have any horses, so the Christian message traveled through vast and rough terrain without cars or horsepower. And there were other hardships besides. Just before our first reading today, Paul met opposition by Jews and Gentiles both and a mob stoned him and left him for dead outside of Lystra in what is modern day Turkey. Furthermore, not everyone was OK with Christianity spreading to the Gentiles. On this point, there was a lot of debate on this point and how to adapt the Jewish heritage to those outside of their tradition. Indeed, the fledgling Christians were still figuring out all the implications of what it meant to be disciples themselves, and yet the world took note that these Christians have a different way of life, and many wanted to be a part of that. Jesus tells us in the Gospel today, “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” It’s a simple condition for discipleship, to love one another as Christ has loved us.

But here is where it gets complicated. What does it mean to love as Jesus loved? We use the word “love” a lot... and for a lot of people and a lot of various things. We love America, we love it when things work out, we love to win, we love humor, we love our spouse, we love our families, we love the Buffalo Bills, we love ice cream... When we tell those closest to us that we love them, are we saying we love them in the same way I love rock and roll, so put another dime in the juke box baby? In the Greek language, there are actually 6 words for love: *ludens* – a playful, teasing sort of love; *eros* – a passionate love and attraction; *mania* – an obsessiveness that occupies our being; *pragma* – a sensible arrangement in view of family life, home, and community; *philia* – friendship; and *agape* – a selfless love. Though we don’t necessarily need to know all these different kinds of love, it is safe to say that we have experienced many kinds of loves in our lifetimes.

But what does it mean, then, to love after the example of Christ and so be his disciples? Borrowing from the wisdom of Pope St. John Paul II, I would like to suggest that Christian love, to love like Christ, consists of 5 things – being: faithful, forever, free, full, and fruitful. If you’ve got something to write these down or take notes on your phone, I give you permission to be a good student here. It’s important that we know these because the world has a different version of love and if we’re not careful, we will trade the love of Jesus for something else masquerading as love when it really isn’t true love at all. Love is faithful, forever, free, full, and fruitful.

- 1) Christian Love is faithful. It doesn’t wait for something better to come along. It’s not based on lies or falsehoods or wishful thinking. Love consists in being true to one another in all the ups and downs. Love keeps its promises and is there for one another, unmoved by anything outside of that relationship. As with disloyal friends and cheaters, love is cheap without faithfulness but faithful love makes us feel special. Christian Love is faithful.

- 2) Christian Love is forever. Love is not a fling based on feelings alone. As with crowd-pleasing entertainers and celebrities who live for the moment, without a sense of forever and the commitment to it, there is no enduring relationship to speak of nor is there any 'us' to talk about. Every moment, every experience, and every decision impacts the togetherness that faithful love has created. Naturally, we don't want love to end. Christian Love is forever.
- 3) Christian Love is free. Love is given unconditionally and not on the basis of exchange, of what I can get out of it. It is not transactional. We would not want to be in a relationship with a master manipulator who is always calculating, always measuring our actions. Where does trust fit in? Love is given without strings attached. Love respects the autonomy of the other and doesn't try to control them. Only free love can be mutual love. Christian Love is free.
- 4) Christian Love is full. The measure of our love is our willingness to sacrifice for the other and to put them first. People who strive only to do the minimum are not in love. Love is generous in every aspect of life. Love gives everything and holds nothing back. Christian Love is full.
- 5) Christian Love is fruitful. Christian love does not create insular relationships like black holes in which everything else around it gets sucked in. Love is life giving and generative, and invites others to be a part of that. Love fosters a community of persons. Love creates the space in which life can grow and blossom. It generates good things for others. Christian Love is fruitful.

I try to remember all five words myself but sometimes I miss one but remember the 5 'F's: faithful, forever, free, full, and fruitful and you'll be alright. Thing is if it is missing even one of these elements, it is not true Christian love. Imagine a love that is faithful, forever, full and fruitful but isn't free. That's called slavery. Think of a love that is missing faithfulness. That's a fair-weather friend. Without forever, it's a one-night stand; without fruitfulness it's selfish; without fullness, it's disinterested and void of meaning. And this Christian love isn't characteristic just between spouses, but between family members, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, visitors, and strangers all. Jesus exemplified these aspects of love – all you need to do is look at the cross. God demonstrates his *faithfulness* to us in fulfilling his promises and opens up the possibility of a love that endures *forever* through all manner of sin and death; on the cross, Jesus gave *fully* of himself and held nothing back, not to enslave us but so that we might be *free* from all manner of sin and death and that we in turn might willingly go and bear good *fruit* that will remain. Indeed, the love of the early Christians exemplified these five characteristics as well. They were faithful to the message. They setup communities and structures that their love might endure forever. Nowhere did they force others to believe, but offered their witness freely. They fully gave over everything to their mission in the face of great hardships. Their love was fruitful helping Christianity to grow. Indeed, against all odds, their love after the manner of Christ allowed Christianity to not only survive but to grow and thrive and prosper because it was a different love: a faithful, forever, free, full, and fruitful love - this is what it means to love like Christ. It is this love we all desire, but it is a love that you will be hard-pressed to find anywhere else. The love of God is doing something new in our midst and these lesser versions of love must pass away. How closely does our love match the faithful, forever, free, full, and fruitful love of Jesus? Perhaps, if we can give ourselves to this love, like the early Church we too would overcome the challenges we are facing in our world today

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Lectionary: 54

Reading I

Acts 14:21-27

After Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed the good news to that city and made a considerable number of disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch. They strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." They appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith. Then they traveled through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia. After proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now accomplished. And when they arrived, they called the church together and reported what God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 145:8-9, 10-11, 12-13

R (cf. 1) I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.
or:

R Alleluia.

The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and of great kindness.

The LORD is good to all

and compassionate toward all his works.

R I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

or:

R Alleluia.

Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD,

and let your faithful ones bless you.

Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom

and speak of your might.

R I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

or:

R Alleluia.

Let them make known your might to the children of Adam,

and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Your kingdom is a kingdom for all ages,

and your dominion endures through all generations.

R I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

or:

R Alleluia.

Reading II

Rev 21:1-5a

Then I, John, saw a new heaven and a new earth.

The former heaven and the former earth had passed away,

and the sea was no more.

I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem,

coming down out of heaven from God,

prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race.

He will dwell with them and they will be his people

and God himself will always be with them as their God.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes,

and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain,
for the old order has passed away.”

The One who sat on the throne said,
“Behold, I make all things new.”

Alleluia

Jn 13:34

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I give you a new commandment, says the Lord:
love one another as I have loved you.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Jn 13:31-33a, 34-35

When Judas had left them, Jesus said,
“Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.
If God is glorified in him,
God will also glorify him in himself,
and God will glorify him at once.
My children, I will be with you only a little while longer.
I give you a new commandment: love one another.
As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.
This is how all will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.”