

What does it mean to love? A loaded question, if ever there was one, right? What does it mean to love? This should be a very simple question for us to answer as Catholics...the Church has had a central definition from the moment of her formation. We've been able to articulate that definition very succinctly since Thomas Aquinas; and yet, many of us may still struggle to answer this very straightforward question - what does it mean to love? The likely problem most of us might run into in defining love is one of equivocation. For the better part of the last century, our society has done all it can to make this most foundational of ideas ambiguous by way of subjectivity. Love means what it means to the lover. "The heart wants what the heart wants". "To each their own." "Love is in the eye of the beholder." Nonsense...utter nonsense. Notice how all of these definitions of love focus on the desire of the one expressing love...they're all self-serving definitions. The hidden premise in all of these is that love ought to serve me...that I must get something out of my expression of affection...that achieving my own end is the ultimate goal of love. This is perfect for the flourishing

of the enemy. Satan's whole purpose is to keep us from God. God is

love...if we can't define what it means to love...if our idea of what love

ought to be is wrapped up in self-interest, then we effectively make

ourselves "god". Our affection, our dedication, our worship turns

inward, and we end up idolizing the face we see in the mirror.

Obviously, this is not what the Lord intends for His people. In order to

combat this tendency within ourselves, we must keep always in our

hearts and minds the true definition of love. To this end we reverence

what Jesus taught us first on the Cross...the same lesson that St. Thomas

would put into words 12 centuries later - that to Love *is to will the*

greatest good for the other, no matter the personal cost. This is

self-sacrificial love...this is the very essence of God Himself. Nurturing

this kind of love in one's heart is what sets us apart from the world, and

marks us as followers of Christ. It is essential for growth in holiness,

and the kind of figurative, spiritual suicide we're all called to - that we

may put ourselves to death, so that Christ may live more fully in us.

This is the core message our readings deliver to us in a powerful way today.

In our first reading from the Prophet Ezekiel, we hear God beseeching His people to act as His voice to those living in error. **“You, son of man, I have appointed watchman for the house of Israel; when you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me. If I tell the wicked, ‘O wicked one, you shall surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way, the wicked shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death.”** In His wisdom, God ties our fate to our brother’s, ensuring that those who hear His voice - you and I - will have cause to move our hearts to love our neighbour as God loves us. We must will the greatest good for our brothers and sisters living in error. This means that we must love them too much to leave them in darkness. We must love them enough to call them to the light. No more can we make excuses to “live and let live”...no more can we take the easy road, by avoiding difficult topics when certain people close to us crop up in our lives...no more can we

give in to the cowardice that bids us to water down our faith or deny truth when it is challenged in our presence. When we do these things, we serve ourselves in the short term, and all but ensure our downfall in the long term - for those things we fail to rebuke will cause the death of our brother, but we will be held accountable for them.

The second reading is very like the first: St. Paul writes, **“Brothers and sisters: owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments...are summed up in this saying, namely, ‘you shall love your neighbour as yourself.’”** it’s probably safe to assume that we all want the highest possible good for ourselves, so, St. Paul is instructing us to foster the same desire for those around us. This is very easy to say, much more difficult to do...but what is impossible for man, is possible for God. We ought to be asking Him every day for the grace and strength necessary to do precisely this - to love...to will the greatest good...for all those we come in contact with.

Finally, in our Gospel, Jesus tells us to go and tell our brother if he has sinned against us...to instruct those who are harming the Body of Christ, so that they may have the opportunity to reconcile before they must give an account before God. This is not to be for us an opportunity to belittle or shame our brother. It isn't a chance for us to look down on another from our ivory tower, or to bring our own will to bear on another for selfish gain. Rather, it is a chance to extend a helping hand to one in need. It's a rescue mission. *De Oppresso Liber* - to free the oppressed. To bring light to those in darkness...to offer to another the kind of freedom we enjoy as followers of the Way.

In all of these readings we see in action the universal command to engage in the spiritual work of mercy that is instructing the ignorant...an act of kindness that has to be borne first from a place of great love. God desires all mankind to accept the gift of salvation offered them, so, He sends us to be the heralds of the coming of the Kingdom...His design requires us to cooperate with His will...to "Go and teach all nations", then we not only affect our own salvation, but the salvation of all those

we meet, who then act to save those they meet, and so on, and so on,
until the whole of the world burns with love for the Father.

This cannot happen if we are not doing our job. How dare we stand in the way of the fulfilment of God's will on earth!! Would it not be better for those who do so that they would have a great millstone tied about their neck, and be cast into the sea! Jesus certainly thought so. How dare we let fear or embarrassment, or love of comfort, or our own ignorance of God's word, or any other selfish desire come between us and the sacred duty entrusted to us from the very moment of our rebirth in the waters of baptism. How dare we refuse to work constantly for the God-Man who condescended to take on our lowly form, to suffer, die, and rise again so that we would not have to endure the just sentence that was ours in our sin. When you and I fail to speak up when we're given the chance, this is what we become...a stumbling block for God's children, our own kin. We are all sinners...we live in constant need of God's mercy...but mercy is only given to the merciful. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." If we do not

have the mercy in our hearts necessary to reach out with charity to those living in opposition to God or His Church, that they may see the light of Christ, then we cannot expect mercy to be extended to us in our time of need.

The bottom line is that we can't afford to shirk this duty, or any of the other corporal or spiritual works of mercy. God is giving us a wonderful opportunity to help build His Kingdom on earth. On a practical level, this isn't a very demanding task, at least in the sense that we're surrounded by error on every side. We don't have to go out into the peripheries to find the lost sheep...they are, quite literally in some cases, right in front of us. Family members, coworkers, friends, and casual acquaintances...the people we claim to love the most...we ought to be for them the guardian and exemplar of truth, even if they don't immediately appreciate us for it. Remember, the prophet is not welcome in his own home...we are our brother's keeper...the truth isn't always easy to hear, but speaking it is our job, and we are called to do that job without regard for the cost. Ask God today for the depth of love that

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drives us to speak the hard truths, so that, at the end of your days, you may escape the judgement rightfully reserved for those who lacked the trust to love as Jesus loved - with reckless abandon. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!