

Living the Reign of God on Earth
May 15, 2022
Gospel of John 13:1, 31-33a, 34-35
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In our Gospel, Jesus speaks of a new commandment. "Love one another as I have loved you." What is new in Christ's love for us? What is new and different in the new commandment he now gives? What is different from the original commandment to love God and love one another as yourself? First we must ask how did Christ love us?

The law commanded people to love their brothers and sisters as they love themselves, but our Lord Loved us more than Himself. There was nothing he held back, nothing self protective about how deeply he demonstrated love for us. That depth of love can only come from above, from the source of life itself.

Life in this world is no picnic and to press on in the face of hardship and resistance takes courage and perseverance. We don't always see the fruits of our faithfulness. But sometimes we do. In today's reading from Acts, Paul and Barnabas travel around 'strengthening the souls' of the disciples they meet, yet not without 'many persecutions.'

And though He was the Son of God, Jesus was also human so he felt all the pain and suffering, the pain of rejection, loneliness, and emotional distress that the rest of us feel. In this way, through Jesus, God above identifies Himself with the lonely, the afflicted, and the rejected.

In the second reading, John hears the voice, 'Behold God's dwelling is with the human race'. That informs us as human beings of our dignity as children of God - - that our humanity in spite of its deep flaws is worth dying for. I know people who have been deeply traumatized in life, who suffered the deepest of grief, who think nobody can understand the depth of their pain and that God has rejected them. Some feel they have sinned so badly God could never understand or forgive them.

Jesus, the Son of God, experienced the best and worst of human experiences, the deep intimate relationship with the Father and the abandonment and isolation of the cross. He laid down his life and He picked it up again. Each of our lives and circumstances are encompassed by Jesus narrative (the Pascal mystery).

Over and above the actual circumstances by which his mission played out, the key message for us in our individual circumstances is that **as the Son of God, Jesus followed the will of the Father. And as a human being, Jesus faced his fears and pressed on,** impelled by the love within him. We are called to face our own fears and doubts, embrace our faith, our mission, and carry on embodying God's love.

The more we face our fears and doubts, the less fear and doubt can control us, and the more free we become to truly love, as Jesus loved. There are consequences to our choices to love as Jesus loved and in this world, some of those consequences are not

pleasant. Nobody likes suffering. Nobody likes to be rejected. Nobody signed up for the pain and brokenness so prevalent in this world. Nobody in their right mind signs up for cancer, or other physical and mental afflictions or for daily violence in their lives, or the trauma they have experienced. Yet because it is a reality that is beyond our control, we need to decide how we will respond. Suffering can make us deep in compassion and forgiveness. However, it can also make us deep in bitterness and anger.

Only compassion and forgiveness bring glory into our lives.

Mindful that last weekend was Mother's Day and that May is the month of Mary, **we see in the Blessed Mother and in so many mothers who have lived in this world, one who loves as Jesus loved.** It started when Mary responded yes to the Angel Gabriel - - a yes to God without conditions or qualifications. 'May it be done to me according to your word.' As difficult as things got, Mary never tried to convince Jesus of anything other than his mission and obedience to the Father - - no matter how much grief and suffering it caused her.

We can learn from her when we grieve the things that in our own lives we have had to let go of, and have resulted in pain and grief. Perhaps we can pray:

'Lord you gave me the gift of a son or daughter, mother or father, brother or sister, wife or husband,...I tenderly surrender that person back to you in thanksgiving, in spite of the deep sadness and grief I am experiencing now.'

Being here alive amounts to so little, and so much. Life in this world is all so passing, yet so precious.

The kingdom of God is described as a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth. The old will pass away. There are things about this present life that will pass away yet there are also things that signify the presence of the Kingdom among us. The Kingdom of God is in a sense here already and not yet.

As we continue through this Easter season, may we continue to learn what it means to begin living as if the Kingdom of Heaven is already here. It is really about how we treat others over and above how they treat us.

As we celebrate this Eucharist may we as Christians on a mission, recognize our role as initiators. Though we see so much in the world that is contrary to the Kingdom, we can still choose to live as He lived and love as He loved, thereby being an instrument of bringing about the reign of God into this world, all through the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen.