

6th S. of Easter 5/5/24
John 15:9-17 B

“THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.”

At the close of World War II, a few GIs were walking into the city of London on Christmas morning when they came to an old gray building with a sign reading: “Queen Anne’s Orphanage.” To see what sort of Christmas party might be going on inside, the soldiers knocked on the door. An attendant told them that all the children in the orphanage had lost their parents in the London bombings. The soldiers went inside, and, to their surprise, they saw no tree, no decorations, and no gifts. So, they started to dig through their pockets to give whatever gifts they could find -- a stick of gum, a coin, a stubby pencil. One soldier saw a boy standing alone in a corner. He went to him and asked, “My little man, what do you want?” Turning his face up to the soldier, the little boy answered, **“Please, sir, I want to be loved.”** That’s our world -- in desperate need of love.

I. This Sunday, we hear the words of Jesus, *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you”* (v. 12). Yes, yes is our reaction, of course I love my neighbor. But, there are those neighbors that are not that easy to love. Especially, that neighbor who harmed us. That neighbor who broke up my marriage. That neighbor who stole or vandalized my property. That neighbor who spread mean gossip about you. These hurt, they cause real tears and grief and we just don’t want to love them.

Sometimes, perhaps more often than we would not to admit, we are not all that loveable. We are prideful, selfish, self-centered. We have spoken mean, harsh, hurtful words to those who love us the most -- our parents, our children, our spouse. We have ignored our neighbor in their

need so that we could buy more toys and have ease. We have kept a record of wrongs and refused to be reconciled. We have not always put the best construction on everything and explained everything in the kindest way.

II. But, there is Good News for us. God did not want us to be His enemies and in continued conflict and strife with one another. He wanted us to love one another. So, He reconciled us to Himself and to one another in Jesus.

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends,” Jesus says (v. 13). The sin which separated us from God and from one another was laid on Jesus and Jesus laid down His life on the altar of the cross so that that sin would be done away with forever and we would be forgiven. Peter teaches us this in our 1st reading, *“They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him on the third day”* (Ac 10:39). The Easter resurrection of Jesus means that we have new life in Christ.

III. *“As the Father has loved Me, so I have love you. Now remain in My love,”* Jesus says. *“These things I command you, so that you will love one another”* (vv. 9, 17). Throughout our lesson, Jesus teaches us that we are to love one another. Throughout the Scriptures, we Christians are told again and again and again that we are to love one another because we are in great danger of not loving one another.

Oh, what sin has done to us! We do not love our neighbor as God has loved us. We put ourselves first. What I want always comes first. We don't want to be inconvenienced. We don't want to sacrifice our money, our talents, most certainly not our time. No matter what it is, we look at it and ask, “What's in it for me? What do I get out of it?”

In the death of our sin, we have no ability to love as Jesus loves us. To those who heard His words at Caesarea, Peter *commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Ac 10:48)*. In Holy Baptism, we die to sin and all self-centeredness and selfishness and the Holy Spirit makes us a new creation in Christ Jesus, giving us a whole new life in our Savior. We learn from our Catechism:

How can water do such great things? “Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God’s word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, this is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit.”

In baptism, we literally receive a heart transplant. There is nothing but love and forgiveness in the heart of Jesus Christ. Living in Him, there is nothing but love and forgiveness in our hearts.

In Christ, we are able to love as Jesus loves us. I call your attention, once again, to the 2 parts of the cross. The vertical beam reminds us that God has reached down in love to us. The horizontal reminds us that we are to reach out in love to our neighbors. As God reaches out in love to us, we reach out in love to our neighbor. The Apostle John says it this way, *We love because He first loved us (1 Jn 4:19)*.

The words of Jesus in our lesson are part of what is called Jesus’ Farewell discourse. He is preparing His Church for the time after His ascension when He would no longer be bodily present with them. They will live in a world which will hate them as it hated Him. But, even though He has ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven, He will continue His work through those who branches grafted into Himself, the True, Vine.

Like the little boy in that London orphanage so many years ago, our

world desperately needs love. So, God gives His creation the love He intends for it and wishes for it by loving His creation through you, “*love one another as I have loved you.*” Born again of water and the Word, we live as Jesus Christ did; we love as Christ first loved us.

John teaches us this in our Epistle, *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments (1 Jn 5:1-2).* The 10 Commandments are a guide for us; the Commandments teach us how to love another as Christ has loved us.

We are patient. We are kind. We are not envious. We do not boast. We are not rude. We do not put our wants first. We are not easily angered. We keep no record of wrongs. We do not delight in evil.

We are kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. We bear one another’s burdens. We rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. As far as it depends on us, we live at peace with all men.

Historically, this Sunday, the Sunday before the Ascension, is known as Rogate Sunday, Prayer Sunday. This Sunday receives its name from the words of Jesus in John 15, “*Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you*” (v. 7). I call that to your attention because we can show our love for one another by praying for one another – especially praying for our enemies.

To love as Christ has loved us, we must be new in Christ. Daily, we must return to our baptism to put to death the desires of our flesh. Daily, we must be in the Word of God. We must come to the Lord’s Table to be fed His Body and Blood, for it is through these means of grace that we

remain in the love of Jesus, that we may love as Jesus has loved us.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.