

***“Love One Another”***

We find ourselves today in the thirteenth chapter of John's Gospel, this is one that is rich with meaning and events – in the Upper Room – on the night Jesus was arrested. In the beginning of this chapter we hear about what Jesus knows this night will bring – and how He responds: John writes *“Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.”* (John 13:1b) He knows that the Father has given all things into His hands, and that He has come from God and is returning to the Father very soon. And so what does Jesus do? He gets up from the table and takes on the role of a slave, or servant - washing His disciples' dusty, dirty feet. Jesus also knew who was about to betray Him and therefore He announces the looming betrayal to His disciples, and incredibly He then goes on to feed His betrayer. Jesus told them *“It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.”* Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon.” (John 13:26) The result is immediate: *“As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.”* (John 13:30) Right after this happens – today's Gospel lesson begins. This answers the question that you might have been asking yourself: when WHO was gone? Judas – Judas Iscariot! You might expect Jesus to go into a tirade against Satan and how he is driving Judas' actions or even to speak poorly of Judas' work as treasurer – but instead a compassionate Jesus focuses on His mission and He continues to prepare the remaining disciples for what is just about to happen.

Jesus speaks about being glorified and of glorifying the Father – in which He is referring to His being lifted up on the cross; He is going to be crucified and then fulfilling the mission that He was sent to accomplish. Let's look at page 1674 of our Pew Bibles - John 13:31-32. *“When he was gone (meaning Judas,) Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will glorify the Son in Himself, and will glorify Him at once.”*

Jesus tells them that His time on earth with them will be ending very soon. They cannot join Him in heaven now, but they will be able to follow and join Him before long. There is still so much for them to learn in His coming arrest, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension – that will prepare them for His special gift to them of the “Counselor,” the “Comforter,” – the Holy Spirit. There will be betrayal, denial, fear, doubt, and a flood of negative emotions before they will become overjoyed with the presence of their risen Savior and eventually strengthened and emboldened by His Holy Spirit. Their missions will be made clear to them in time – but much more needs to be accomplished before then.

We need to remember that all of this is taking place on that Thursday evening in the Upper Room, during their Passover Seder meal – and their heads must have been swimming. For all of them, things are about to get worse at an incredible pace of just four days.

Fifth Sunday of Easter – April 24, 2016, Year C

They have already received the sacrament which we call Holy Communion, and their feet have been washed by our Savior. Before they leave the Upper Room to go out to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus needs to give them some further instructions. *"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* (John 13:33-35)

This “new command or commandment” -- *“Love one another as I have loved you”* -- is in parallel with what Jesus has already told his disciples: *"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."* (John 13:13-15) These words are in the middle of chapter 13 – and so much is going on in this Upper Room during this evening.

The “new command” they will hear again as Jesus further explains in John 15, after Jesus tells them that He goes to prepare a place for them, that where He goes – they cannot come; that His Father’s house has many rooms. Then Jesus tells them the words that have caused people to either follow Jesus or to walk away – when Jesus said *“I am the way, the truth and the life – No one comes to the Father, but through Me!* (John 14:6) In Chapter 15:12-17 Jesus tells them *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.”* Richness in these verses alone! They are elevated from followers to friends and reminded that with the love of Christ and servants hearts – they have been invited to carry on Jesus’ work in this world.

On the one hand, loving each other as Jesus has loved embraces the ordinary; it means serving one another, even in the most menial tasks. On the other hand, this love embraces heroic acts of great risk; it extends even to the point of giving one’s life for another.

I find it incredible that each of the remaining disciples, after Judas has left, each of these would be killed; laying down their lives for others. John was poisoned, yet he did not die. God had a plan for him, to go to the Island of Patmos and receive the Revelation of Jesus Christ – that we call the Book of Revelation. Wow! All of them would do what Jesus had said *“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”*

The love of which Jesus speaks, then, and which Jesus demonstrates in His life and death, is a love which extends from the ordinary and is a self-giving act. Jesus tells his disciples that it is by this kind of love that everyone will know that they are His disciples (John 13:35).

Fifth Sunday of Easter – April 24, 2016, Year C

As I was preparing this message, being an old “worship leader with guitar” I found myself remembering this old song, often sung at what used to be called “Folk Masses” or Cursillo retreats which you might remember as well:

*We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord  
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord  
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored  
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love  
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love*

*We will work with each other, we will work side by side  
We will work with each other, we will work side by side  
And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride  
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love  
Yeah, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

I wanted to find out more about this song and who wrote this. I found that Fr. Peter Scholtes wrote this hymn while he was a parish priest at St. Brendan's Roman Catholic Church on the South Side of Chicago in the 1960's. At the time, he was leading a youth choir out of the church basement and was searching for an appropriate song for a series of ecumenical, interracial events. When he couldn't find one, he wrote this now-famous hymn in a single day. It exudes the love of Christ and is truly inspired by the Holy Spirit.

It is true that Jesus commands His disciples to love *one* another, nevertheless, He also declares God's love for the entire *world* (John 3:16). “*For God so loved the world!*” He didn't quantify it just a group of people, or to a race, or to a religion. He declared His love for the entire world – that means you and me! It includes those outside the community of believers in the faith. Jesus demonstrates the depth of God's love for this often-hostile world in His death on the cross. In chapter 13, Jesus demonstrates His love for the same disciples who will go on to fail Him big time; miserably in just minutes, if not hours. Jesus washes and feeds Judas who will betray Him, Peter who will deny Him, and all the rest who will fall asleep while Jesus endures His Agony in the Garden, failing to stand by Him in His hour of greatest distress. When the soldiers come – what do they do? They run, they hightail it, they get out of there! The love that Jesus demonstrates is certainly not based on the merits of the recipients. Jesus commands His disciples to love others in the very same way that He does.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, all of us have continually fallen far short in our love for one another as well as in our love for those outside of the Body of Christ. Theological and ethical arguments have often descended into personal attacks and name-calling; personal interests often take precedence over the needs of Christ's church; and often those in need of compassion find judgment instead.

Jesus could not have been clearer: It is quite simply by our loving acts - acts of service and sacrifice, acts that point to the love of God for the world made known in Jesus Christ. They will

Fifth Sunday of Easter – April 24, 2016, Year C

know we are Christians by our love! We don't do those acts to earn heaven – we do them because Jesus told us to, and we love just as Jesus told us to!

Jesus said that our Christ-like love will show that we are His disciples. Do they know you are Jesus' followers by your love for one another? Love is more than simply warm feelings; it is an attitude that reveals itself in action.

How can we love others as Jesus loves us? This is terribly convicting when you think about how we can love others as Jesus loves us:

- By helping when it's not convenient,
- by giving when it hurts,
- by devoting energy to others' welfare rather than our own,
- by absorbing hurts from others without complaining or fighting back.

This kind of loving is hard to do. That is why people notice when you do it and know you are empowered by a supernatural source.

Holy Scripture has another beautiful description of love in 1 Corinthians 13:

*“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”* (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)