

Fifth Sunday of Easter - May 15, 2022

Deacon Steve Livingston

St. John is called ... the disciple whom Jesus loved ... and St. John ... perhaps more than any other writer of Sacred Scripture ... has much to say about love. He tells us simply that: “*God is Love.*” In John’s Gospel Jesus says: “*If you keep my **commandments**, you will remain in my love ...*”. These are just a couple of the many examples in John’s writings ... and today’s Gospel has, perhaps, the most **important** one: “*... 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.***”

The importance of love ... love of God ... love of neighbor ... cannot be over-emphasized. We hear it mentioned so often ... not just from St. John but from **most** of the New Testament writers ... and perhaps we hear it **so** often that ... instead of driving the point **home** to us ... we become **desensitized** to it. If so ... that is a **shame** ... because there is nothing **less** than our eternal **salvation** at stake!

He is **not** saying: **like** one another ... or **tolerate** one another ... or put **up** with one another ... but **Love** ... one another! And He’s not saying: “I give you a new suggestion.” He’s not saying: “I have a new request.” He’s not saying: “why don’t you try this.” It’s not a **recommendation. It is a Commandment! Love ... one ... another!**

He goes on to tell us what this **love** we are to have for each other is supposed to look like. “As *I ... have loved ... you*, so you ... should love one another.” **As I have loved you** ... this is at the heart of the very Paschal Mystery itself. Think about it! Remind ourselves! ... What is **our** greatest goal? Is it not eternal happiness with God in heaven? And yet ... is this not also what Jesus gave up? He is and was God. All this was his ... He had it all ... the best and the most we can ever hope for ... and so much more. But ... in St. Paul’s words: “He **emptied** himself and took the form of a slave ...

being born in the likeness of men ...”. And ... He did all of this knowing that He would suffer humiliation ... torture ... and an agonizing death. **This** ... dear friends ... is love ... freely given ... unconditional ... and undeserved!

As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. He never said it would be easy! And He went on to say: “This is how all will **know** that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” This was to be the yardstick by which we are to be measured ... the yardstick that tells whether or not we are **truly** disciples of Christ! The apostles and those other earliest followers measured up! How do we? The martyred, last-century prophet of non-violence ... Mahatma Gandhi ... was asked by a Christian missionary: why, since he **quoted** Christ so often, did he **reject** becoming a Christian? Gandhi replied: “Oh, I **don’t** reject Christ. I **love** Christ. It is just that so **many** Christians are so **unlike** Christ”.

And how do each of us do individually? It’s so easy to love the lovable ... but how do we do with the unwashed ... the drunk ... the marginalized ... the immigrant ... the refugee ... the guy who cuts us off on I-35 while talking on his cell phone ... the obnoxious ... the ... just ... plain **unlovable**! As Pope Francis once asked: Do we build **bridges** to bring others closer or **walls** to keep others out? We might ask ... if Christ were to stand before me today how would He judge **our** love? Perhaps I should judge **myself** ... and if I don’t **like** what I see perhaps things need to change. ... perhaps I need to change.... but How? ... .. An admirer once asked a famous sculptor: how he carved such a marvelous likeness of a bear? The sculptor replied: I get a block of marble and just chip away **everything** that does **not** look like a bear. Perhaps that is our answer. If you examine your life and find hatred, hostility, prejudice, bigotry, resentment or even ambivalence ... **anything** ... that does **not** look like love ... then ... with the help of God ... chip it away!