

5th Sunday of Easter
Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski
May 15, 2022

Over the years, Mary and I have been fortunate to travel to many national parks and view the beauty of God's creation. Among our favorites is Glacier National Park in Montana, in the Rocky Mountains on the Canadian border. During the times that we hiked on the backcountry trails, we needed to be "bear aware." For you see, Glacier is one of the few places in the lower 48 states where Grizzly Bears abound and there are few things more risky than rounding a bend in the trail and inadvertently getting between a Grizzly mother bear and her cubs. The love that the Grizzly mother has for her cubs is beyond compare in the natural world.

That love of the mother Grizzly Bear, although instinctual, pales in comparison to the love that Jesus has for us. In John's gospel, we just heard Jesus tell his disciples at the Last Supper, "I give you a new commandment: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."

So, Jesus challenges us to love one another as he loves us. And how much does he love us? Well, I've been reflecting on that question and last Sunday, it hit me. While listening to Bishop Johnston's homily on Good Shepherd Sunday, the Bishop, in this very spot, looked to his left—to the stained glass window of the Good Shepherd—and made reference to that window in his homily. Then it struck me: These windows, these stained-glass windows which were created by local Kansas City artisans 110 years ago, give us wonderful examples of the infinite love that God has for us.

- From the Prodigal Son, we learn of God's infinite forgiveness: It doesn't matter how far we stray from our Heavenly Father or how much we squander the gifts he provides, he is always delighted when we turn back to him.
- The woman with the ointment helps us see that if we give our all to the Lord, then the Lord will tell us, as the quote in this window indicates, "thy sins are forgiven thee." So, too, should we love, and forgive, one another.
- Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will never abandon us, any one of us: His love endures forever.
- In the next three windows, we see the ultimate in sacrificial love: Jesus' passion, death and resurrection.

Throughout John's gospel that we've heard on Sundays throughout this Easter season, we haven't heard a sentimental view of love; rather, John's Gospel presents a love that is based on service and sacrifice. Jesus tells his disciples, and us, that all will know that we are his disciples because of the love we show for one another. The phrase, told often, of the early Christian community—"See how they love one another"—is repeated throughout the Acts of the Apostles. Christian love is the hallmark of Christianity. We see it lived in the witness of the martyrs. We see it in the example of the lives of the saints.

The path of sacrificial love is hard to choose when faced with the indifference, hatred and anger that we see all too much in the world today. Yet, we see it, among us today, in the holy women and men who live and love daily, making small and large sacrifices for others.

I conclude with an example of sacrificial love from a recently canonized saint: Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

One day, as Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity were tending to the poorest of the poor on the streets of Calcutta, they happened across a man lying in the gutter, very near death. He was filthy, dressed in little more than a rag while flies swarmed around his body. Immediately, Mother Teresa embraced him, spoke to him softly and began to pick out the maggots that were nesting in his flesh. A passerby, repulsed by the sight of the man, exclaimed to Mother Teresa, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." Her response was immediate: "Neither would I!"