

May10, 2015

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

If we were to ask almost any Christian in this day and age, "What is the greatest commandment in the Bible?" the answer would probably go something like this:

"To love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves." Or they would recite Matthew's Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Christ's greatest command, according to the Gospel of John, and as we heard this morning "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you"

Once again from this place we call a pulpit...that is from the Latin word "pulpitum" meaning platform or scaffold ...(interesting !)...I remind you that Jesus is not suggesting this loving one another is a sort of nice thing to do, if we feel in the right mood, or have that inclination....

Sorry guys and gals but have I got news for you. Once again this is not just a suggestion to us. **This is a Commandment...an Order from Jesus that we love one another....the way Jesus loves us,**

In my book that means that we love each other without judgment....sure we have to live our lives according to Society's laws, otherwise there would be chaos....but in the last analysis Jesus gave us this commandment,, and only God has the job of being Judge and Jury.

When we think about the implications of such a love we may quietly admit to ourselves, "Come on..this has to be just a suggestion, an aspiration.... there is no way that I could love others to the extent that we are told Jesus

loves me.” In fact I cannot think of anyone, even Father Rosa who can actually fulfill this commandment”.

In the passage that precedes Jesus’ command to “Love each other, as I have loved you” Jesus speaks about the foundation of that love. In John's Gospel that we heard last week, our Lord says, “I am the true vine; you are the branches... Abide in me... and bear much fruit...”

There’s something fundamentally important about the concept of a vine or a vineyard in Israelite thought. The vine has become a symbol of Israel as the people of God. Israel is pictured in the Old Testament writings as the vineyard or the vine of God.

Father Tom discussed this in detail last week, but it is interesting to me how the OT prophets never used this concept apart from the moral decline of Israel. For example, Isaiah pictures a vineyard that has run wild. Jeremiah complains that the nation of Israel has turned into a “degenerate plant of a strange vine.” Hosea decries the fact that Israel is an “empty vine”.

When Jesus made the statement, “I am the true vine”, we can just see all of their defenses go up.

Jesus was actually saying to them, “Listen my friend, you think that you are a branch and a vine just because you belong to the people of Israel. You think that you are the real thing just because you are a part of a special nation... because of your birth and nationality.” Well have I got news for you !!

The prophets saw a vine that was in desperate need of pruning. And they were right. Again and again the people of Israel strayed from their intended purpose as God’s chosen people. Jesus, however, has a legitimate claim to the title of “true vine”, because his fruits were rooted in the power of God. Israel had lost its rootedness in God their Savior.

But Jesus in his physical life as a flesh and blood human being was firmly rooted in the love of God.... Jesus was firmly established in an intimate

living fellowship with God and faith in God. His actions and teachings had their life-source in God's love. The secret of the life of Jesus the human being was his connectedness with God. He frequently withdrew into a solitary place to meet and have fellowship with God. Jesus was always abiding in God.

In our day we find it so very hard to withdraw from our busy schedules to be with God. We are hard pressed for time to listen to His voice of love and grace. When we take the time to speak to God, we are often not patient enough to wait on Him and listen to His voice. "Remain in my Love", we hear the invitation of Jesus coming to us. Don't just do a hit-and-run kinda deal. But, remain! Abide! Stay for while! And listen...

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you...", says Jesus. In fact it is a statement that begs the question. That is to say the statement reaches a conclusion "so have I loved you" without adequate reasoning "How, exactly then, did Jesus experience His Father's love?" What did he get from God in exchange for his obedience?

Well, we know for a fact that God never gave his son a Mercedes to drive around town in, or even a horse and chariot - which would have been more appropriate at that time.

But, what we do know is that the heavenly Father gave his son Jesus an infinite sense of belonging and being rooted in his love. "You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased", we hear the blessing spoken at the time of his baptism. God gave Jesus a firm foundation... the conviction of His Presence, his counsel and his faithfulness in times of trial and temptation. Jesus received from His heavenly Father a peace that far transcends the restlessness of this world. The Father's love assured him of a sense of security and safety in a harsh world.

There is a great word in German,(Inga) "Geborgenheit" meaning total safety and security...am I right Inga?

That is the affirmation that we too can experience through the love of Jesus. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you..." As we experience the love of Jesus, we are the recipients of a love that goes far beyond material things. It is a love that transcends human comprehension. It is a love that cannot be earned... a love that knows no boundaries... A love that we couldn't get, even if we chose it. It has to be the greatest of all gifts.....

We did not choose Jesus. Rather, he chose us for his divine purposes.

On Tuesday of this week my Auntie Gwen died. Auntie Gwen was my mother's younger sister and she died at the age of 93. I first met Auntie Gwen when she was 19 years old and I am told practiced her violin playing in our garage.....in my dad's words, "one of the worst sounds he had ever experienced".

For many years my mother and my Aunt Gwen were at odds with each other, to the point of estrangement. I remember as a very young man, this made me feel so dreadfully sad.....simply because I loved both of these ladies and why on earth didn't the love overcome bad feeling.

As I have "grown" ,and I am really not sure that is always the right word..... I have learned about jealousy, competition, petty differences that balloon into something much greater that becomes the tool of the devil, that is perceived hatred. But throughout those bad times and through a long period of reconciliation, my love for Auntie Gwen and her love for John and then Karen ...that love endured and in fact grew.

Karen and I visited with Auntie Gwen last October...and we left knowing that our love for each other was stronger than ever

I believe my feelings for Auntie Gwen is exactly what Jesus was teaching us in today's Gospel.

Many of the more fortunate of us take parental and sibling love for granted when we are children. My years of ministry have taught me that sadly this

is frequently not the case. However for those of us that are raised in innocence, our first experience of what love is, is when we experience the first death of a relative or someone very close to us.

In my case it was Auntie Gwen's mother.... Grandma died in 1964 and like Auntie Gwen, I loved Grandma.

Auntie Gwen and Grandma and so many others that have and will go ahead of me....now remain in my heart and soul and mind....and I believe that is exactly what Jesus commandment "to love each other to the same degree as God loves us" is all about.

As persons of faith, we believe that our souls will be resurrected and we will all be together again in heaven. Let us bow our heads for a moment and pray for ourselves and those without such faith.

Dear Lord, we pray that all persons' eyes are opened to the love of Jesus Christ...and as their eyes are opened let us all remember what Jesus so vividly demonstrated to us"

The Lord is Risen.... The Lord is Risen indeed Alleluia.....Amen

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