

6th SUNDAY OF EASTER - B - 2006
“So I also love you.”

No matter how hard I try, I can't grasp it. What Jesus is saying to his disciples he means for our ears as well. *“As the Father loves me, so also I love you.”* It's just too much. These are the kind of words that are spoken by a lover to his beloved. If we adapt them just a tiny bit, you may see what I mean.

“My beloved,” Jesus says to us, “All the love that has ever been poured over me for all eternity, I now pour over you. More than anything else, I want you to know that love, to live in that love. I want you to remain in that love forever. And if you believe me and believe in my love for you, the very love of God will be in you, and you will live in God's love as well as in mine. My cherished one, I want you to live to the full. I want all that is good for you. I long for your heart to be filled with joy. All you need is to live in my love.”

Like I say, it's just too much. Jesus is loving us like that, even now, at this very moment. We wonder, how could he? Doesn't he know my sins? Doesn't he know my failures? Doesn't he know the way I treat people? Ignore people? Use people? Doesn't he know how I use him? I claim to be his follower, and then live like everyone else? He offers himself to me in love whenever I want him, but I say, *“No thank you. I'm busy. I have other things to do. I have a head ache.”* And Jesus still loves us? Yes, Jesus still loves us.

In our small little minds, we still hold on to the idea that we have to earn Jesus' love; that his love for us depends on what we do, if we are good, if we say our prayers or whatever. But that isn't what this gospel teaches us. It says Jesus loves us as we are. God doesn't love us because we are good,

but because God is good. That is the God revealed to us in Jesus. Love is what it's all about.

Deep down, I think we really do want to earn Jesus' love. You know why? Because then, others will have to earn ours. That's why this gospel is so hard for us to grasp. It has profound implications on how we treat others. We want to be in control. We want to dole out love only when we feel like it; to this person, and not that person; at this time not that time. We want to be nice to this kid, and ignore that kid; be merciful to this sinner and condemn that sinner. And to the degree that we are of that mindset, to that degree we are still not living in the Spirit of Jesus' love.

So Jesus gives us a new commandment. *“Love one another as I have loved you.”* He could never have given this commandment earlier in his ministry. He could only give it after he had revealed the intimate relationship he had with his Father, a relationship he now invites us to share in with him. It is only when we are flooded with the love of God in us that we are empowered to love as Jesus loves us.

The early church wrestled with this amazing revelation of God's astounding love for us. And it was St. John in his first letter that gives us insight into the implications of what it all means.

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God;
everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.
Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.*
(1Jn 4:7-8)

As one saint put it, *“Love God and then do as you will.”* Boy does that ever sound dangerous. Do as you will? Anything? Yes, anything! Because what you will do if you live in God's love will flow out of that love. Let's make it easy. What if I say, *“Love your children and then do what you will.”* Is that giving you permission to

abuse them, hurt them, ignore them, treat them harshly? No, because love doesn't do such things. If we live in God's love, we will do what love does. This is why I often tell parents who are impatient with their children, *"Before you discipline them, look at them with love. Then do what you have to do, which may be disciplining them, but you will do it out of love for them, not out of self pity."*

Granted, the one we love can still hurt us, and will. And love can often feel like disappointment, disillusionment, even betrayal, but that is the price of love. Don't think Jesus didn't feel those same feelings during his passion. But those feelings arose from his love for those who denied him, abandoned him, rejected him and killed him. In other words, the way of love is the way of the cross. *"Love one another as I have loved you,"* is just another way of saying, *"Take up your cross and follow me."* Without love, we cannot be a disciple of Jesus. But with love, we can change the world.

In a few minutes we will baptize some little babies. That means, through the sign of dying and rising, they will rise to new life. They will be born into the very life of God, the life of the Trinity. The love of God that existed for all eternity will flood their being. And in time, please God, they will come to learn about that love and even the God who is love, but not first from a book. They will learn love from the love that surrounds, sustains and becomes part of the air she breathes as she grows up, especially from her mother and father, and their love, not just for her, but for each other.

They say that if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. But I didn't say it. Jesus did, the way, the truth and the life.