

My dear people of God, in today's Gospel, Jesus reveals to us the secret that can transform us and the whole world: **love for one another** will work the miracle; and nothing else will." I give you a new commandment: love one another just as I have loved you" John 13:34. Only love can render us fit to live in heaven; by doing **ordinary things with extraordinary love**: little things, like caring for the sick and the homeless, the lonely and the unwanted, washing and cleaning for them." Reflecting on today's Gospel, Mother Teresa remarked that the greatest disease in the world today is not tuberculosis, leprosy or even A.I.D.S.; it is being unwanted, uncared for, unloved; that is why she did her part in trying to "cure" this disease, which was attested to in everything she did and in every word she said.

As today's readings indicate, love has been the great motivator of Christianity from the beginning. Love of God, love of Christ, love of the Gospel and love for humanity motivated the earliest missionaries to persevere in the faith even when they had to undergo many trials. "They strengthened the spirits of other disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying it is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). The Evangelist's account of the itinerant ministries of Paul and Barnabas provides his readers with a sense of how thoroughly love had informed their efforts. Leaving nothing to chance, they kept close contact with their new converts and with the community of Antioch in Syria who had first commissioned them. After proclaiming the Good News in several towns, they would retrace their steps and offer reassurance and encouragement lest the seed of the faith die and the bonds of love be broken. Love also motivated them to let go of their centuries old prejudices and warmly welcome gentiles into the community of the faith.

John, the seer, in the second reading from Revelation, shares a vision of nuptial love. When all the former things have passed away and sin and evil are completely overcome, God will welcome the redeemed as a husband welcomes a bride. The love and life that they will share will preclude tears, pain, crying out, mourning and death (Rev.21:4). This vision inspired John's readers to persevere through their struggles and assured them of the constant and sustaining love of their divine bridegroom.

In his last hours with his own, Jesus reminded his followers of the legacy he would bequeath to them. A living legacy of love that would challenge them to love one another as he had loved them; this same legacy was to be the means by which they would be identified as Jesus' disciples. Notice also the context within which Jesus gave the commandment of love to his disciples. Near the end of his time with them ("I am not going to be with you much longer") and at the precise moment when the Synoptic Gospels present their narratives of the institution of the Eucharist, the Johannine Jesus mandates his followers to a mission of love. As Thierry Maertens and Jean Frisque (*Guide for the Christian Assembly*, Fides Publishers, Inc., Notre Dame, IN: 1972) have noted, "it is as if for him love was just as real a memorial of Christ as the Eucharist itself."

Today, we who claim to love Jesus and to be his disciples must allow the evangelist to turn his questions on us. . . Is my love for Christ, the Gospel and the Church obvious in the way I live my life? Is it an identifying characteristic? Is the love relationship I share with God deep and true enough to sustain me in times of struggle, trial and tears? If love is lacking, then today is the time to turn again to the one who has first loved us and who can "make all things new!" Authentic love is not a feeling produced by the emotions; it is a thoughtful, free and deliberate act of the will. Moreover, as is reflected in today's pericope from John, love is a *commandment*, not a suggestion, but a *new* commandment which is to be the identifying feature of the followers of Jesus.

Finally, dear friends. Love is a command from our Lord Jesus Christ, a command that overriding all others as St. Augustine puts it "love genuinely and you may do whatever you wish" that is to say, genuine love puts us beyond the risk of doing evil. May God give us His grace to be faithful to this new covenant of love so that we may love God and one another all the days of our life. Amen.