

5th Sunday of Easter “The Expectation to Love”

Bishop Frank Schuster

My friends, we can summarize the Bible in three Scripture passages. Ready? First John 4:16 tells us God is love. Genesis chapter 1:26-27 says we are made in the image and likeness of this God who is love. What are we supposed to do then? In 1 Corinthians chapter 13, St. Paul says, without love we are nothing. In the Gospel of John today, Jesus tells us, I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you.

God is love. We are made in the image and likeness of this God who is love. Therefore, love. The meaning of life is that easy and yet very hard. Why? We have troubles loving as we ought.

Notice how Jesus gave this commandment at the last supper after Judas had left them? You see Judas wasn't open to this Gospel of love Jesus was preaching because he wanted to promote the Gospel of Judas, which at the moment was collecting 30 pieces of silver in exchange for betraying his former master. Judas was interested in the “gospel” of serving himself.

Now, biblically, love is not about serving ourselves but about serving others. It is like the Philippians hymn, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself to become one like us. That word “empty” in Greek is *kenosis*, and has become the buzz word in theology to describe love as self-diffusing or self-emptying. Contrast that with St. Augustine's definition of sin. For St. Augustine, he described sin in Latin as *incurvatus in se*, or a curving inward of the soul.

So if sin is a curving inward of the soul, love then is *kenosis*, a self-emptying, or a curving outward of the soul. The most perfect sacrament Jesus offers us is holy Eucharist. In the holy Eucharist, Jesus gives us his very body and blood as food and drink. Once again, we have a model of love based on *kenosis*, self-emptying, or the curving of the soul outwards towards others.

Jesus made the remark once how easier it is to love our friends than our enemies. He said, what merit do we receive from this? Even the worst of sinners love their friends and hate their enemies. Jesus challenged his disciples to even love their enemies. What does that look like? You see, I think it is helpful sometimes to distinguish between the words “love” and “like”. Does Jesus expect us to like everyone who hurts us or is unjust to us? I don't believe that is what he means at all.

There were many emotions going on inside of Jesus when he was crucified on the cross. I don't think liking the people who were crucifying him was one of them. He sure did love them though. He sure did love them. He loved them and the whole human race enough to die for us for the sake of our salvation. Similarly, when someone hurts us or is unjust to us, I don't think it is realistic to expect ourselves to like these people. We are on to love them. We are on to love them.

So, think of all the people in our lives that we have reason not to love. This should be easy given the dangerous world in which we live, or given the polarization of our political leadership in our country. However, usually the most painful hurts come from those closest to us. You see, all of us at some point or another have suffered a broken relationship or a breach of trust of someone close. Sometimes these hurts can feel just about as bad as what Judas did to Jesus. The question becomes, how do we love them?

I believe we begin to demonstrate our love through prayer, praying for their conversion, working toward justice rather than vengeance, and always seeking the higher road in how we conduct ourselves. What does this kind of love feel like sometimes? It can feel very difficult inside, it may at first make ourselves feel worse rather than better. True love however is a choice that does the right thing whether it feels good or not. And so we can ask ourselves, who are the people in my life I don't like? Now we can ask the harder question, how can I love them this week, in my thoughts words and deeds? This will be difficult, but then again, discipleship must look like something.

You see, discipleship understands that love is not always about how we feel, but more about what we do, and the choices we make. Jesus is our exemplar. Therefore, love is a choice of the heart. In everything that we do, from our personal relationships, our relationships at work, and our relationships in our community, discipleship understands that love demands *kenosis* rather than *incurvatus in se*.