

Sixth Sunday of Easter A - "And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him."

May 14, 2023.

Happy Mother's Day to all mothers, grandmothers, godmothers, religious mothers. The 15th chapter of John's gospel is filled with love. These few verses in this Sunday's Gospel reading (14:15-21) form the first part of the three dimensions of a Christian's life, and all three are centred in love. It's a remarkable section in a profound and moving chapter. The word "love," both as noun and verb, is repeated nine times in only eight verses evidently showing the theme of this chapter. Something both beautiful and heartbreaking unfolds here. Christ lays his heart bare to his friends and disciples. "I have chosen you," he tells them, "you didn't choose me," and he repeats, "I have loved you." But he makes it clear that this relationship is not just two-sided. The source of all this love is God the Father. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you." These are powerful words, and when one truly hears them, they can force the soul to kneel before her maker. And then Jesus uses that enduring metaphor: abide in my love. Stay, remain within it, live in my love. The verb, *meno* in Greek, "abide" in English, has a continuing connotation. This is not a short-lived experience; this is for life. "Abide in my love." Such a powerful state of being does not happen in isolation, or simply as an act of the will. It is very closely related with a requirement that Jesus makes into a condition for love.

"Whoever has my commandments and observes them, is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him."

One of the many joys of being a deacon is to officiate at weddings. As deacons, the diocese register us to have the provincial license to legally sign marriage certificates. Weddings come in all sizes and shapes, but most of them have one thing in common: love. After the couple goes through the parish Marriage Preparation Course and before officiating at a wedding, I will meet with the engaged couple and part of our discussion centres on the reasons why they are getting married. Love always plays a significant role in these reasons. And yet that little word *love* can mean many different things. We fall in love, and we love being in love. We love people and animals, sports and ice cream, and certain types of weather! Love songs are one of the most popular types of music. So when we consider that love is the fruit of the Spirit, what exactly are we talking about? As St. Francois de Laval said, ***We must earn love through gentleness, patience and charity.*** True love is a sacrificial action. It seeks to bless others. It seeks the best interests of others. The more we value God's saving love for us, the more the Spirit moves us to share that love with others in both our words and our deeds.

We know the opposite of love is hate. Samaritans were the people that everyone hated in Jesus's time. The Romans and Greeks and other gentiles hated them because they saw them as just another group of Jews, only ones who could not benefit the empire much. The Jews hated them because they saw the Samaritans as half-breeds. The Jews believed that the Samaritans had polluted blood, part gentile and part Jew. Back in the 8th century before Christ, the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and brought thousands to exile in Assyria. Many of those who remained in the Northern Kingdom married pagans and worshiped both Yahweh and the pagan gods. These were the Samaritans. When two hundred years later the Jews of the Southern Kingdom returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian exile, the Samaritans offered to help them rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. The Jews refused telling them that their very presence in the Temple would desecrate it. The Samaritans hated the Jews for looking down on them, and the Jews hated the Samaritans for their history of accommodation with the pagans.

The Samaritans too were also looking for the Messiah, but they knew that the Messiah would come through the Jews. What chance did they have of being brought into the New World Order the Messiah would establish? On the other side of the dispute, as difficult as the Jews had in accepting the concept that salvation would be available for the gentiles, the concept that salvation would be offered to the Samaritans was not even considered a remote possibility. The Samaritans were lower

than low. In this Sunday's first reading (Acts 8:5-8, 15-17) Philip arrived at the capital of Samaria. He spoke about the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Could it be that the Messiah of the Jews would also be a Messiah for the Samaritans? The Samaritans were open to faith in the Gospel. Through Philip they witnessed the signs of the Messiah being worked right there among them. Cripples walked. Demons came out of people. Everything that the prophets wrote about was taking place not just among the Jewish Christians, but right there among the Samaritans. They accepted Jesus with joy. They were no longer rejects, but one with the people of the New Way of Jesus Christ. As happy as they were, the new Samaritan Christians were given an even greater gift than they could have ever expected. Peter and John had heard about Philip's work among them. The two great apostles went to Samaria. They prayed over them asking God to send the Holy Spirit upon them. They laid their hands on them and the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit the same way the apostles did on Pentecost Sunday. They were confirmed in their faith. This, in fact, is one of the earliest biblical references to the sacrament of confirmation. It was very clear to all the followers of Jesus, these Samaritans were equals in the faith, equals in the Body of Christ, equals in salvation.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, have you ever had feelings like those Samaritans had before Philip visited them with the Gospel? Have you ever felt that you were not good enough to receive the gifts of the Lord? Have you ever looked at another person in the Church and wished you could be half as good as he or she is? Perhaps we have all felt that way at various times throughout our lives. This reading tells us that in the eyes of God we are good enough. He makes us good enough. He calls us to faith, and then showers us with the gifts of faith. The joy that the Samaritans had is our joy. We are loved by God. He gave us His very life. He gave us his very spirit, the Holy Spirit. Look, we know that we are human beings who often sin, but we cannot allow abusive thoughts to destroy us, whether those thoughts come from within us or from others. We are precious in the eyes of God. We are also precious in the eyes of all who truly proclaim God. It is a mistake for me to compare myself with other deacons. It is wrong for you to compare yourselves with other people at whatever stage of life you are in. It is a mistake for parents to compare themselves with other parents, for men to compare themselves with other men, for women to compare themselves with other women. It is a mistake for Teens and young adults to compare themselves with their companions, or classmates. It is wrong for any of us to compare ourselves with our brothers or sisters. We are individuals, not clones. It is wrong for any of us to think, as the Samaritans must have thought, that we are not as good as others. God loves each of us for who we are, not for what we think we should be like. He loves us for whom He created us to be. We are created in the image and likeness of God; yet in the mystery of God's creation, each of us is a unique reflection of this image and likeness. We are not rejects. Now He calls us to give witness to the world that His love is real. We can do this. We can proclaim Jesus Christ with our lives. We are good enough, plenty good enough. Let's pray the How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43) by Elizabeth Barrett Browning: ***"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight For the ends of being and ideal grace. I love thee to the level of every day's Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light. I love thee freely, as men strive for right. I love thee purely, as they turn from praise. I love thee with the passion put to use In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith. I love thee with a love I seemed to lose With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath, smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose, I shall but love thee better after death."*** Remember, what Jesus tells his disciples and us, **"This is my commandment: love one another as I love you."** When we accept this commandment, we walk the path of joy. When we internalize this law, we become happy. God bless you all.