

Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time A - Unconditional Love

August 2, 2026

This Sunday's readings point us to a reflection on God's love. In the first reading, from Isaiah (55: 1-3), the first part of which is proclaimed at the Solemn Easter Vigil, we hear the Lord calling us to Himself: "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price...listen, so that you may live..." Our God is calling us to himself, to everlasting happiness, and into his love. In the second reading (Rom 8: 35, 37-39), St. Paul says nothing that the world throws at us, no evil assault, not even death itself can keep us from the love of God. In the Gospel reading (Matt 14: 13-21) Jesus goes off on his own to mourn the death of John the Baptist, or perhaps to consider the mystery of the Father's plan, certainly to pray. But He is called out of prayer by people who need Him, people He loved even if their own kind had killed John. He cures the sick; he preaches to their hearts, and then he feeds them. He feeds us even now. He feeds the emptiness of our hearts. He does this because He loves us. And His Love is overwhelming.

God loves us with an unconditional love. We have heard this many times. What does it mean? He loves us for who we are, not for what we do. He loves each of us because He sees in each of us a unique reflection of His image and likeness. This is a fundamental truth of Christianity. We are loved. As human beings we often feel alone in the world. Even a busy mother with children pulling on her nonstop has times that she feels alone in the middle of the hustle of the house, but she is not alone. Older people consider the deaths of so many of their friends and relatives and feel very alone in the world. "Why am I still here?" They ask. But they are not alone. They are here because God still wants others to experience His love in them. Children and Teens often feel alone. "No one understands me," they are convinced. They are right, no one in this world understands any of us. But God understands us. We are not alone. We are loved. All that God wants from us is that we turn towards His love. He wants us to acknowledge His love and live in His love. Come to the water and drink. "But I have offended God," we say, and yet, He still loves us. He forgives us when we seek his mercy. And his mercy is greater than our sins. His mercy is incomprehensible. Sometimes God's merciful plan is laid out through humans. A good example is the 9/11 2001 event. On September 11, 2001, following the terrorist attacks in the U.S., Canada enacted Operation Yellow Ribbon, diverting 38 international jetliners and nearly 7,000 passengers to Gander International Airport in Newfoundland. This sudden influx nearly doubled the small town's population. For five days, the resilient residents of Gander and surrounding communities opened their hearts and homes to the stranded, widely known as "come from aways". The local townspeople's love and care is obvious when they immediately mobilized to feed and shelter the displaced passengers. Hotels, schools, churches, and private homes were transformed into temporary living quarters. Generosity is shown when residents provided hot meals, clothing, medicine, and toiletries. Local bus drivers temporarily ended a strike to assist with transportation. This extraordinary display of global goodwill, compassion, and human connection inspired the hit Broadway musical *Come From Away*, which brought the story to international prominence and left a lasting legacy. Instead of thinking of ways to retaliate such a violent attack, the Canadians offered compassion and hospitality as God would have planned for that to happen.

Not like most parents who tell their children that they would forgive them for disobedience or wrong doings but put them on probation in order to gain back their trust, God never puts us sinners on probation. God's love is so much greater than this. He forgives us when we tell Him we are truly sorry for our sins. We don't have to earn his trust back. We just have to live in his love. We cannot comprehend how much God loves us. What we can do is live in His love, enjoy

His love. "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in His love." (John 15-9 10). His Love is more powerful than the world and anything the world attempts to throw at us. St. Paul tells us that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

When Jesus was sad in mourning the loss of St. John the Baptist, the crowd followed him and he had compassion for them. Forgetting about his own loss, he provided for them, healing their spiritual and physical needs. In the same way, Jesus is showing us that with the little that God has provided for us, whether it's our talents or our money, we can share with others to minister to their needs, showing forth the compassion of Christ and extending his friendship. When we gather around the altar to celebrate the eucharist by our presence, we make an offering of self and show that with the rest of the church we accept the challenge of Jesus to do what we can for the good of others. The Lord not only invites us here to be nourished at his table but sends us forth to give as we have received, to forgive as we have been forgiven, and to love as we have been loved. At the end of mass, the priest or the deacon will always say, "Mass is ended, glorify the Lord with your life." Yes, attacks from terrorists can kill us but not destroy us. Attacks on our Catholic way of life can marginalize us in society, but they cannot kill us. Sickness can weaken our physical lives, but we remain strong in the Lord's powerful love. Loneliness might isolate us, but in reality, we are never alone. Our God is always with us. He loves us so very much! Unconditionally!