

SPIRITUALITY

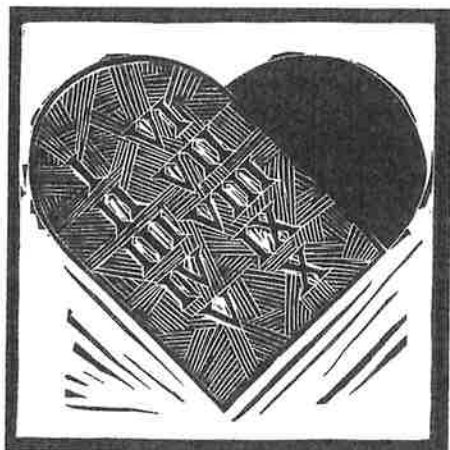
GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 13:34

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

I give you a new commandment, says the Lord: love one another as I have loved you.

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.



Gospel

John 13:31-33a, 34-35; L54C

When Judas had left them, Jesus said,
 “Now is the Son of Man glorified,
 and God is glorified in him.

If God is glorified in him,
 God will also glorify him in himself,
 and God will glorify him at once.

My children, I will be with you only a
 little while longer.

I give you a new commandment: love
 one another.

As I have loved you, so you also should
 love one another.

This is how all will know that you are
 my disciples,
 if you have love for one another.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

We continue reading from the Gospel of John during the Easter season. This evangelist has unique things to say about Jesus, and he relates stories about Jesus not found anywhere else. Our gospel reading for today is a case in point. Other gospels have Jesus saying, “Love your neighbor” (Matt 19:19; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; NABRE), or even, “Love your enemies” (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27; NABRE). But today we hear the simple but profound command to “love one another,” which presumes that there are others in the community. In cases where semantics can open a debate about “who is my neighbor?” or how precisely we “love” an “enemy,” the command to love one another is straightforward and leaves little room for negotiation or explanation. Further, it is a command related to “one another,” which means those in the Christian community closest to us. In some senses it harkens to family, and the relationships we have with one another as family. It’s nearly a plea for siblings to do more than “get along” but to actually “love one another.”

But Jesus goes further, pointing to the example he gave them as a model for love: “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.” In a few chapters, we will see that includes laying down his life for them. The disciples will be known by their love for one another. Our own displays of charity and acts of love will mark us as Christian.

To love one another is challenging. It can be easier and more convenient to go to church, or to sit in one’s room and pray. But love requires action and some doing. As is often said, “Love is a verb.” The image of a family comes to mind again as it can be easier to love those on the outside or the margins. But what about those most familiar to us? We know their foibles, idiosyncrasies, annoyances, and habits. We have a history with them. Yet, we are called, perhaps even reminded, to love one another.

For the Fourth Gospel, all ethical commands of Jesus may be summed up in this one command to love. Other than some references that seem to reflect the Ten Commandments (don’t steal, lie, covet) the Gospel of John has one overriding exhortation: Love.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Ghandi is reported to have said: “I love your Christ, but your Christians are not like Christ.” From this we might be fairly sure that the Christians he encountered were not living up to the ideal reflected in today’s gospel. That is certainly unfortunate. But what image of Christianity do we present by our actions? By our love? Do we love like Jesus did, to the point of laying down our life?

It can be easier to be consumed with external rituals or internal theological debates. But Jesus’ command today is simply to love. In its simplicity, it is exceptionally difficult. Love knows no bounds. Love does not say, “That’s enough.” Love puts the needs of the other ahead of our own. And in our global society we see that vast numbers of people have more needs than we do. Where to begin? It is our life’s calling as a disciple of Jesus to follow him in the way of love. It’s been said that a great journey begins with a single step. So we love one another and in doing so we become more devoted disciples of Christ.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.

To the point: Jesus prefaces this new commandment to his disciples by telling them, “I will be with you only a little while longer.” Speaking at the Last Supper, Jesus prepares his disciples for what is to come. Soon Jesus will not be with them in the tangible way they are used to. They will no longer be able to walk with him in person or to ask him their questions and hear an answer with their ears. They are moving into a new time of discipleship, a time that will require more from them. In this time to come they are to love one another as Jesus has loved them. And soon, Jesus will show them just what that love looks like when he lays down his life.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: Although in some places the Acts of the Apostles presents an idyllic picture of the early church, the first communities of Christians were not without their disagreements. One of the first of these was about how to admit Gentiles to the church, and whether they must first undergo a process of Jewish conversion, that is, be circumcised and follow Jewish dietary laws. In the first reading, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, shares with the Jewish Christian communities “how [God] had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.” This time of transition where the Jewish Christians welcomed Gentiles must have been difficult at times, and yet, the church survived and thrived by following the commandment Jesus gave to his closest friends on the night before he died, “[L]ove one another.”

to experience: Only in love are we able to form the Body of Christ. Only in love are we given the grace to find unity in our diversity and to worship God as one.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Just as modern authors and poets enjoy word play, so, too, did the psalmists of ancient Israel. Though it’s hard to tell in English, in Hebrew, today’s psalm is an acrostic in which the first word of each line begins with the letter of the alphabet in alphabetical order: *aleph, bet, gimel, dalet*, etc. There are about a dozen alphabetic acrostic psalms in the Bible. The verses we pray with today center around the theme of God’s mercy and goodness, as well as the glory of his reign. In the second reading from Revelation we see an image of God’s kingdom where “there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain.” Even as we await the fulfillment of this kingdom, we can continue to build it every day when we follow the new commandment Jesus gave, “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.”

to psalmist preparation: We belong to the glorious reign of God when we love with the self-giving love of Christ. How do you embody this love? Where in your life is God asking you to love with more intention?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

In the first reading, Barnabas and Paul minister to the fledgling Christian communities through prayer, fasting, and proclaiming the Good News. How do you support others in faith?

Jesus gives us a new commandment: “[L]ove one another.” How do you show love for the people closest to you?

When in your life have you needed to make a conscious decision to act out of love? What helped you make this decision?

Jesus says we will be recognized as his disciples by how we love each other. How loving is your parish community? What issues are you currently dealing with that might require an extra outpouring of love and charity?