

Homily: 6th Sunday of Easter (Cycle B, 2015)

“This I command you: love one another.”

St John’s writings, his gospel and letters, speak of “love”, not in a way we use the word today, but in its truer understanding as “sacrifice” and “oneness”.

For myself, a baby-boomer born in the 50’s, reared through the 60’s, coming to self-awareness in the 70’s, did not really come to understand the meaning of love until the turn of this century. For me, love is what I learned from my parents, from a mother and father who struggled thru life together, raising 3 children and having the trauma of losing as many, sacrificing all they had to keep a family together.

I learned about love in the music I listened to, Rock and Roll, being with your girl on the beach or under the boardwalk, carefree days under the sun, life is beautiful, war – what is it good for; it was the 60’s, what more can be said. And I learned from those other youth I grew up around, although what could we possibly teach each other about love at such a young age.

It was these understandings of love, a conflict in terms in my mind, but an understanding none the less, that carried me into the 70’s and forward, still looking for what love truly was. Only in looking back over my life can I find if I lived a TRUE love, or just one that society tells us is the love we want to experience. How SOCIETY defines love today is so far from the truth that the word itself no longer has any meaning.

Love is not sacrifice, it is gain – I love money. Love is not an intimate encounter, it is dominance or a gratifying hook-up. Love is not caring, it is the answer to the question “what can I get out of it”.

This is NOT the love John writes about. This is NOT the love Jesus teaches to us. Jesus tells us of the love of a Father, HIS Father, who loved what He created so much that He called it not just “good”, but “VERY good”. He tells us of the love of a Father who never turned away from His creation, but ever watched over it, looking for it, for US, to turn our faces back to Him who created us. He tells of a

love that is so great that He sent His only begotten son, not to chastise us, but to show us the way back to the Father, to sacrifice his own life as reparation for all our troublesomeness. And all that is ever asked of us is to keep his commandments.

There are only 10 commandments, and I know from experience that they are VERY hard to keep. REALLY?!? Is it really that hard to love God, to love the one who loves us no matter what we do? Sometimes when we're on vacation we might have to "sacrifice" an hour or so, and maybe even go out of our way, to get to Mass. Is that very much to ask? Sometimes we might have to twist our own arm to call home and tell our parents we love them, you know, honor your father and mother. For those of us who can no longer do that we may need to take a moment to tell them, from the depths of our hearts, how much we love them. I might like to have the biggest house, the fastest car, or the latest stuff on the market, but can't I abstain from something I'd like to have and give an offering to someone who has not.

What's the downside of doing something for someone else, and NOT expecting anything in return? What's wrong with sacrificing if that sacrifice comes from the heart, a genuine sacrifice, a TRUE love for another? It is through a sacrifice of our time, treasures, and talents, many times offered to others unknown to us, total strangers both near and far, that we start to come to know what the meaning of love truly is.

It is in DATING that one comes to know the other, but it is in marriage that each sacrifices themselves for the sake of and love for the other. It is in the rearing of children that parents come to know the deeper sacrifice of love, when we are called to give ALL that we have. For the single person, who sacrifices the physical intimacy of another by living a chaste life, yet enjoys the fullness of love in the sharing of self in the company of others.

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus offered the ultimate sacrifice for his friends, for us. By his example we are called to sacrifice, to do without something we'd rather not give up, and to do it for the sake of our friends, family, strangers, others. WHY? Out of love, and because Jesus asked us to do it. Isn't THAT reason enough!

Love is sacrifice. Sacrifice is love. "This I command you: love one another."