

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (2025 - C)

Today I would like to spend some time reflecting upon our Lord's commandment: **"Love one another."** Jesus said, **"As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."**

So what can we say about love? Few English words have more levels of meaning than does the word love. For example, a child might say, "Grandma, I love ice cream." A little later as grandma prepares a dish of ice cream, that same child might say, "Grandma, I love you!"

A young man might say, "I love football." A young woman might say, "I love my cat." Later, that same woman might ask that same man, "Do you love me?" In response (without looking up from the game), he might say, "Of course I love you."

A mother might say to her children, "I love you more than anything." While camping up north, a man might say, "I just love it up here!" On returning home, that same man might say to his wife, "You are the best thing that ever happened to me; you are the love of my life." In prayer, one might simply say, "I love you God with all my heart."

Saint John tells us **"God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (1Jn 4:16)."**

All these different ways in which we use the word love explain why when you ask people: "What is love?" Most of them pause for a moment and then reply, "I know what love is but I can't explain it." Some then go on to say that love is a feeling while others say that love is when you care about someone.

What is clear from all the different ways in which we use the word love is this. Love is always linked to what appears good to us. In other words, we love what we judge to be good. No one ever loves what is bad or evil. Instead, we avoid what is bad, and we flee from what is evil.

That means love must be more than just a feeling or an emotion. In fact, love is actually a choice. It's a decision to seek out and acquire what appears good to us. Love is a rational act that involves both our intellect and our will.

So, we could define love in this way: **Love is the attraction to that which is good.**

When we see something that appears good to us, we are drawn to that thing. We strive to acquire that thing. We seek to have it for our own.

Now here's where it gets more complicated. We can acquire things, and we can use the things we love, and that's fine and good. We can own property. We can have pets. We can have all sorts of things and stuff, but with people, it's different. We can never use people.

To put it simply, people aren't things. So you can't use people; you can't treat them like slaves. That would violate their dignity as human beings made in God's image and likeness.

That means with regard to people, we have to refine our definition of love. So, when we love someone (as opposed to some thing), we say that **Love is willing the good of the other.**

When we love someone, we see in them something good, and we are attracted to them because of their goodness. Think of how this works. At first we might be attracted to someone because they are handsome or beautiful or because they are good at something we like to do.

However, on a deeper level, we might be attracted to them because of some good quality or virtue that they have. Their courage or honesty or kindness or gentleness or sense of humor.

So here is the interesting thing about love. When we care about someone, when we love someone for unselfish reasons, we want them to be happy, we want what's good for them. We hope they have health. We are happy when they get a good job. We are excited when they graduate or make their First Holy Communion or get married or have a baby and so on.

At the same time, we are sad when they are ill or when they lose the game or fail their exam or break up with their boyfriend – although with regard to my nieces, I've been happy about that on a few occasions.

The thing is, when we love someone, there is a kind of union of hearts that takes place. We are happy when they are happy; we are sad when they are sad. Furthermore, when we love someone, we actually do things to make them happy, we help them acquire what's good for them.

Parents save for their children's education. Doctors get up in the middle of the night to perform emergency surgery. Priests say Mass for their people. Our love for others inspires us to give of ourselves for the ones we love.

Now, Jesus said, **"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."** Jesus showed us this kind of love when He gave His life for you and for me.

Our Lord saw in us something good. He saw in us the image of God, the image of His Father. And remember here that we are made in God's image and likeness, and also that **"God is love; and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him (1Jn 4:16)."** Jesus saw in us a fundamental goodness, and He wanted that goodness in us to be perfected so that someday, we could see God in heaven.

That is why Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, gave His life for us – that we might be saved. He willed our good. He loved us so much that He willingly gave everything for us, even His life.

In our holy Gospel today, Jesus tells us that we should do the same for one another ...

So why? Why should we do that? Why sacrifice what we want to make someone else happy? Why should parents spend time and money on their children when they could spend it on themselves? Why should husbands or wives do things to please each other when they could just as well do what they want? Why not ignore the needs of those around us and just do what we like? In fact, we could all be doing something else right now instead of attending Mass.

So why sacrifice what we want to make someone else happy? Because it is in giving that we receive. The fact is that love begets love.

The big lie we hear everywhere today, the great deception is this: Take care of yourself first. Look out for number one. Then you will be happy.

However, people who live that way, people who use others, people who are unwilling to sacrifice for others or for God, will never find true happiness. They may lead interesting lives. They may have lots of fun for a time, but here is something that's also true: They will miss out on that true and deep love which only comes through self-sacrifice, that only comes through giving of oneself for another. Furthermore, over time, those people who only live for themselves will end up very much alone, unloved and unwanted. They will end up isolated both in this life and in the next.

Some years ago it was revealed that in Romania, the government used to place orphaned and handicapped children in large, cold institutions where no one cared for them. These children were neglected; they were never held or nurtured. However, babies need to be held and touched, and without that love, these children's mental and emotional development was permanently damaged.

The same is true for those who believe themselves to be unloved or unwanted or for those who have been rejected. They hurt inside because they have been treated cruelly or abused or used or told they were no good. Treating others in this way denies their dignity as children of God. Treating others like that denies their humanity, and it says to them "You are unworthy of love." It says that they are just things to be used.

On the other hand, when we are loved, it affirms that we are not just things, that we are not just animals but that we have a dignity and a worth which comes from being made in God's image and likeness ... and that is how God loves us.

The thing is, when you love someone else, when you want what's good for them, you are the one who has to give up things. Love demands self-sacrifice, and love involves risk. It may be at times that your love for another is rejected, and that hurts, but that is part of the risk with love.

However, in this act of love, in this act of dying to self, in this act of sacrificing for the good of the other, we also gain, and what we gain is this: We gain a richness in life that selfish people will never have.

People who lead self-centered lives make themselves unlovable, and in the end, they leave nothing for others (and even for God) to love. In the end, selfish people isolate themselves, and this self-imposed isolation is what hell is. An eternal imprisonment in a jail they have made for themselves where love is forever absent.

On the other hand, heaven is a place where everyone wills the good of the other. It is a place where goodness abounds. It is a place where God who is love is present to all. It is a place where all have become perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect. So, it is because we were made for heaven that Jesus commands us, **“Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.”** Obey that commandment, and you will gain eternal life. Amen.