

Homily: 5th Sunday of Easter: Cycle C: 2016: Acts 14: 21-27; Ps. 145; Rev 21: 1-5; Jn 13: 31-33; 34-35

“Love truly rooted in the Lord”

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

How do we know what true love is? It is not simply a feeling or a desire of the human heart, but rather is to will the true good of the other: *which is personal union with God and the choices that lead to eternal life with God.* The Scriptures today give us a good sense of what this involves.

1. In the Acts of the Apostles today we are told by St. Paul and St. Barnabas to **persevere in the faith** remembering that, *“it is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.”* Sometimes in our “feel good” culture we need this reminder that this life on earth is not Heaven, but is a spiritual battle and a pilgrimage through the ups and downs of this life. **Yes, we must learn how to love in a Christian way. It doesn’t come automatically and usually involves suffering of some sort.** Why? Well, the Christian way is the way of **self-giving love** which requires us to die to ourselves and selfish desires and want what is **truly good**, as defined by God through the Commandments and teachings of the Catholic Church, for ourselves and others. Concerning purity, for example, do we truly love our boyfriend or girlfriend if we pressure them to compromise their morals before we are married, and not look out for our true good which is to help one another to get to Heaven someday? To resist the temptation, which can be very strong, and practice chastity involves dying to self – but it’s worth it to get to Heaven and avoid Hell. The same goes for **a married couple** in which one of the partners manipulates or pressures the other into using contraception, when this is an objectively grave sin; in those cases the couple is morally required to follow **Natural Family Planning** (see: www.ccli.org) which respects both God’s teaching in this area and each of the partners in the area of intimacy. *(What if one of the partners refuses? Well that is a case where you need to turn to another married couple who is living Church teaching in this area for some wisdom and support, or to a good priest for advice, but only one that you know is loyal to the Church’s teaching and truly wants to help souls become holy and get to Heaven -*

which is not easy and always involves embracing the Cross - but only the Truth of God will set us free - never forget that). We need to realize that to love God, the true objective good, and others is not primarily in our feelings, and that this goes against the world's understanding of "love." How do we do this? *We enter into the way of Christian love first in our intellects by discovering the true good for ourselves and others made known to us by God and the Church, reflect upon it regularly, and then by God's grace choose the good in our wills. It means loving the other person when we don't feel like loving them.* That is a hardship on so many levels for us. We like to go on our feelings!☺ *It means praying when we don't feel like praying. Obeying God and the Church even when we don't feel like obeying. Truly embracing the trials, tribulations and difficulties of life from God's perspective - this only happens if we ask God for the grace to **trust** Him more and more each day.* Otherwise we will fall back on our **default mode of operating** which is: "what's in it for me?" God's way is the way of asking daily: *how can I embrace my Cross in love and serve others more faithfully?* This will only occur if we grow in our trust in God and belief in His love for us. To remember that all the trials of life are either ordained or permitted by God's holy will for our sanctification and eternal good, but that will only occur in reality if we in docility respond like the Blessed Virgin, "Let it be done to me according to Your Word."

- 2. How do we embrace the Lord's commandment to love one another in daily life on a practical level in the midst of the challenges and trials that we must go through to be spiritually purified?** We must make a conscious effort to let go of *all bitterness, strife, anger, jealousy, envy, hatred, foul language, desire for revenge, judgmentalism, etc. towards others, and instead seek to be kind, patient, sympathetic, forgiving, magnanimous (big hearted), humble and self-giving in relation to our fellow human beings.* This is obviously an ongoing process (it doesn't happen overnight!!), and yet daily we should be making progress in virtue with the help of the Sacraments, esp. the Eucharist and Confession. This is the true test of whether we are growing in the likeness of Christ, i.e., holiness, or not: **are we growing in love of God and neighbor?** To be able to see God in other

people is not easy much of the time in this “valley of tears”, but if we make the effort and pray, pray, and pray some more for that grace, it will happen over time.

Christian love must be the motivating force for all that we do in life.

3. **If we persevere** in trying to live the way of Christian love, which is not based on simply what we feel, but rather what we know is good for ourselves and others, and choosing it despite our feelings, then through this real death to self **we will rise to new life in Christ**, which begins even in this world. And someday by undergoing these trials of spiritual purification faithfully, it will culminate in entering into the New Heaven and New Earth promised in the second reading from the book of Revelation today. **It is all truly worth it; despite the sense that we get sometimes in our heart and mind that the world’s way of selfish love is easier and better.** That is a **deception** of the evil one and our fallen nature which always likes the **path of least resistance** and least work. **Never forget** in the midst of the trials we must undergo to enter the Kingdom of God, **the end goal**, as we hear today in Revelation which makes the trials of this earthly life eternally worthwhile: *“Behold God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be His people and God Himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away. The One who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold I make all things new.’”* **Jesus is preparing an eternal place for us in His Heavenly Kingdom, but the key to enter in is the way of Christian love.** May we grow in that gift on a daily basis through the prayers of Our Blessed Mother Please pray the Rosary daily, as a family if possible, make it a spiritual priority, and ask our Lady to help us imitate her total Fiat (Yes) of self-giving Christian **love toward God** (*accepting the offer to be the mother of the Messiah in blind trust*) and **neighbor** (*her first act after the archangel Gabriel left was to make the long journey to go help her elderly cousin St. Elizabeth in her pregnancy with St. John the Baptist*), ***“Be it done to me according to Your Word O’ Lord.”*** May we say the same on a daily basis and live it well with the constant aid of God’s grace. God bless you.