

## NOT A SUGGESTION

There's a story, probably fictional, that as an old man, St. John the Apostle would be brought into a gathering of the faithful to preach. He would sit. People would gather around him and he would say, *Little children, let us love one another*, and that was the end of his homily. That's not going to happen today. At the next gathering he would say the same thing, *Little children, let us love one another*. On the one hand, that seems like some easy homily preparation. On the other hand, maybe he said that over and over because it was what people needed to hear.

Three points out of many from today's gospel.

Point 1: *Where do you live?* Not your address, neighborhood or subdivision. Where do you dwell? Jesus says, *Remain in my love* which is a variation of what we heard Jesus say last week when he said, *I am in the vine and you are the branches*. In other words, it's not just following Jesus' teaching, which of course is important. It means being organically connected to Christ in a real, living way. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton said that the interior life is the continuation of Christ living in us. For a Christian, Jesus' love is to be our dwelling place.

That love tells us who we are as beloved, adopted, children of God. That love comforts us when we are down and challenges us when we become complacent. That love calls us to become the best version of ourselves, which is a contemporary way of saying it calls us to be saints. Christians are called to live in God's love and grow in God's love. In that love, we are loved and we learn to love.

Point 2: *Love one another as I love you*. That might sound like a quaint, warm fuzzy saying. It's not. It's a lifelong challenge. To say, *I love you*, is to say, *I am willing to suffer for you*. To truly love one another is hard enough, but Jesus doesn't leave it there. Here, we find one of the most pesky, irritating words in the Bible and in the English language: *as*. Elsewhere, Jesus tells us to love our neighbor *as* ourselves; to pray asking God to forgive us our trespasses *as* we forgive those who trespass against us; St. Paul tells husbands to love their wives *as* Christ loves the Church.

And today, Jesus tells us to love one another *as* he loves us. His love is total, complete and even unto death, death on a cross. As his disciples we're to love *as* he loves us. We're not just to live in his love, not just to grow in his love but we're to love *as* he loves.

Point 3: *This is my commandment.* To love as Jesus loves isn't a recommendation. It's not a suggestion. It's a commandment and one that we ignore to our own detriment. For Christians, to love one another isn't an option but a commandment, and a useful tool for examining our conscience is to ask: *How have I or haven't I loved as Jesus loves?* In the second reading, St. John tells us that God *is* love. He doesn't say God is loving but that God is love and that means, to love, to really and truly love, as God loves, is to become more godlike, it's to grow in holiness.

Here in the Eucharist, we remain in the love of Jesus which is one reason why the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is so important and it's on Sunday because that's the day Jesus rose from the dead. There are 168 hours in a week and to spend one hour a week in worship draws us out of ourselves, closer to God and closer to our neighbor. –There is something healthy about that, as at least for an hour, we disconnect from other things, even important things to ground ourselves in something, someone, much more important. That can be something not only healthy but freeing. It keeps us from starving our soul and the souls of our children.

Here in the Eucharist, we become what we are, members of the body of Christ and here we are strengthened and strengthen one another as members of his one body. At every Mass, we enter into the hour of Jesus' death and resurrection and we join ourselves, our prayers, works, joys, sufferings, our all with the one sacrifice of Jesus to the Father.

Here Jesus continues to give himself to us under the form of bread and wine, which is another way of saying that here he continues to love us. When we share in the Sunday Mass, we let Jesus love us. –Here in the Eucharist, we remain in his love, we grow in his love and we learn to love as he loves and here in the Eucharist he continues to call us friends. When we look at the crucifix, we see Jesus but he's not

there. That's a statue, not Jesus. When we look at the Eucharist, we may not see Jesus but he *is* there.

The Eucharist is a school of love. Here we learn to love. Here we are strengthened to love. Here we remain in his love. The goal of the Eucharist, the goal of all this is joy and someday complete joy; not mere happiness; not a smiley face in the midst of all the challenges of life, but joy—the joy of being loved and loving both God and our neighbor that helps to sustain us in the challenges of life. The joy that flows from love.

*Remain in my love. Love one another as I love you, and This is my commandment.* Let us love one another. With lives of intentional faith may we remain and dwell in God's love. May we be faithful to his commandment that leads us to friendship and joy. Jesus calls us friends, to go forth and bear fruit that remains, so that in him, we may serve as Jesus serves, give as Jesus gives and to love *as* Jesus loves.