

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, May 23rd 2014

“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.” John 15

We've been reading the powerful words of Jesus to his disciples at the Last Supper. It has been a comforting and consoling invitation to “Remain in me, as I remain in you.” And, Jesus said, “As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.” Then Jesus turns from our deep relationship with him to our relationship with others: “Love one another as I love you.”

This is where most of us struggle in our everyday lives. I suspect my experience is similar to the experience all of us have. When I lose my direct, immediate, grateful awareness of Jesus' love for me, I lose my ability to love others very well. When I don't "remain" in his love for me and let him make his home in me, I lose touch with that love and something happens to my heart, to my ability to have compassion, to even know how to regard someone who hurts me, even someone who annoys me. It is harder for me to recognize that someone who is difficult, and with whom I am angry, might be the way they are because of past hurts, because of insecurities, because of many things I don't know. When I'm more in touch with his love for me, I'm much better at being able to empathize, forgive and to love.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we let this invitation of Jesus - he calls it a commandment - as an opportunity for personal renewal in our experience of his love? If we count our blessings today, the blessing of being unconditionally loved, loved without regard to our failings and sins, then we will grow in peace and joy. The effect will be deep - even for the most jaded and angry heart. We crave his love. We know when we lose touch with it. We become edgier. We start craving other things and we "feed our emptiness" with all kind of things which we falsely believe will "fill" us or at least make us happier. No pleasure seems to last or to be enough. We experience over and over again the profound words of St. Augustine: "Oh Lord, our God, you made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you!"

Letting Jesus love me starts slowly. It begins by not identifying his love for me by whether or not God "obeys" me and gives me what I think I need or desire. We can get into the very bad religious habit of thinking that God doesn't love me when God didn't change the world around me to make me happy.

Letting Jesus love me is about letting him make his home in me. It can be a gradual process. We can begin by letting him love me today and in this moment. This can prepare the way for my letting him love me at a moment a little later, when I feel lonely or empty, or when I feel discounted or frustrated. We can remind ourselves in those moments that he doesn't love us when we get our act together. He

loves us when we don't have our act together. He loves us because we need loving. That's real love. That is when love is comforting and healing. That kind of love leads to deep gratitude. Saying "thank you for loving me" at various points in the day, builds a bond, a communion, a home in his love. Then we can say the words of Psalm 116, "What return can I make to the Lord for all his goodness to me?"

Growing in his love for me makes it possible for me to love the same way. Who will need this kind of love from me today? Who, though undeserving, though at times thoughtless and sinful, needs to be loved the way I am being loved by Jesus? It is usually someone closest to me. How do I get over the tension? How do I forgive? How do change the automatic feelings I have? I simply ask for the grace, the gift, the help I need: "Lord, you have loved me so tenderly when I was most resistant and most selfish, give me the grace to love this way, with this person. Let me forgive him/her the way you have so generously forgiven me, over and over. Let me see him/her the way you see me, my inner goodness, with all my flaws, with such understanding and patience."

When we can ask for graces, based upon our deeply felt experience and remembrance of gifts of love we have received, it becomes blessed. Then, as Pope Francis keeps reminding us, our joy will make a profound difference in our freedom to reach out farther and farther to those most in need of love.

Andy Alexander, S.J. - Creighton University