

Fifth Sunday of Easter C - I give you a new commandment, that you love one another
May 15, 2022.

Brothers and sisters, the Church like a good mother is very wise, giving us a full seven weeks of Easter season. We need this time to reflect on the lessons Christ taught us in his passion and resurrection. Plants have to spend time to gradually absorb the sunlight and transform it into nutrients. Just so, our souls have to spend time basking in the light of Christ's revelation, so that we can absorb the grace God wants to give us. This Sunday especially, we are reminded of the New Commandment that Christ gave us the day before he suffered. We are brought back to that Last Supper, when Jesus gathered with his closest companions and opened his heart to them. It was the night when his heart was overflowed with love as it never had before. It was the night when he revealed the secret identity of every Christian, the distinguishing mark: **"This is how all will know that you are my disciples," he said, "if you have love for one another."** And not just any kind of love, but Christ-like love: **"I give you a new commandment... As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."**

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another." With these words, Jesus turns the world order upside-down—in first-century Palestine and here today. Jesus tells us that everyone will know we are his disciples if we have love for one another. And it sounds quite simple, doesn't it? Just love. Love your neighbour. Love yourself. Love your enemy. Love your spouse. Love your friend. Love your bus driver, your mailman, your pharmacist. Love everybody. Just love. Now, some of that may be harder than others, right? Like, "Love your enemy." — Love someone who bullies you, wrongs you, tries to hurt/kill you?... No way, you may say. Not even a month, we have already forgotten Jesus' crucifixion — **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."** (John 3: 16). St. Paul also tells us, **love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things"** (1 Corinthians 13:7). If love can do all that, why do we still question? Being a Christian is much more than being a member of a club. Being a Christian means having an urgent, important mission in life. It means being another Christ in the world. Jesus gave his very life in order to fulfill his Father's will and win salvation for sinners. Each one of us is called to reproduce in the unique circumstances of our lives that exact same pattern: dedicating our lives in discovering and fulfilling God's will, and striving to help as many people as possible to know, love, and follow Christ.

Christ-like love can take many forms. Yes it's a love which finds its source in God, it is a fragment of eternity within our being and without which our lives have no meaning. One form of love is simply going out of one's way to show an interest in someone else. This is what Jesus did with his incarnation. He left the bliss of heaven and came to this sinful world just to extend us the hand of salvation. Mother Teresa took a woman off the streets in Calcutta. She had sores infested with bugs. Mother Teresa cleaned and dressed her sores while the woman never stopped shrieking and even using swear words and insults. Finally the woman asked Mother Teresa, "Sister, why do you do this? Not everyone behaves like you. Who taught you?" Mother Teresa replied, "My God taught me." The woman said she wanted to know her God. Mother Teresa kissed her on the forehead and said, **"You know my God. My God is called love."** This love has the power to give meaning to impossible situations, to bring light into darkness, to inspire people, fill them with hope and give them the courage to continue on the road ahead.

One thing that can sometimes hold us back in our efforts to follow the Lord's New Commandment is a false idea of what love should feel like. We tend to think that true love is always accompanied by nice feelings, and if the feelings go away, that means the love has gone away too. That's what radio and TV tell us, but that's not what the Gospel tells us.

Love, true love, Christ-like love, goes deeper than feelings. It demands sacrifice, self-giving, and self-forgetfulness. Christ-like love always involves a cross. That's what makes it Christ-like; that's what makes it true love. And the good news is that we have been chosen to be instruments of his grace, channels through which others may experience his love. If we can get this truth to sink in, we will be freer to love more as Christ loves, and we will lead happier lives, and make those around us happier. Maybe the words of a real expert in Christ-like love will help convince us. Here is a profile of real Christian love from Mother Saint Teresa of Calcutta: **People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centred. Love them anyway. If you do good, people may accuse you of selfish motives. Do good anyway. The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. Honesty and transparency make you vulnerable. Be honest and transparent anyway. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway. People who really want help may attack you if you help them. Help them anyway. Give the world the best you have and you may get hurt. Give the world your best anyway. Why? Because in the final analysis, all of this is between you and God...It was never between you and them anyway.**

Brothers and sisters, the gospel is inviting us to look into our hearts and see how we are answering this call to love. There is always the danger that we may be in love with ourselves instead of with one another. The presence of God so easily fades into the background when we give way to inner selfishness. Once upon a time, there was an island where all the feelings lived - Happiness, Sadness, Knowledge, and all of the others including Love. One day it was announced to the feelings that the island would sink so all constructed boats to leave. Except for Love. Love was the only one who stayed. Love wanted to hold out until the last possible moment when the island had almost sunk. Love decided to ask for help. Richness was passing by Love in a grand boat. Love said, "**Richness, can you take me with you?**" Richness answered, "**No, I can't. There is a lot of gold and silver in my boat. There is no place here for you.**" Love decided to ask Vanity who was also passing by in a beautiful vessel, "**Vanity, please help me!**" "**I can't help you. Love. You are all wet and might damage my boat,**" vanity answered. Sadness was close by so Love asked, "**Sadness, let me go with you.**" "**Oh ... Love. I am so sad that I need to be by myself!**" Happiness passed by Love, too, but she was so happy that she did not even hear when Love called her. Suddenly, there was a voice, "**Come, Love, I will take you.**" It was an elder. So blessed and overjoyed. Love even forgot to ask the elder where they were going. When they arrived on dry land, the elder went his own way. Realizing how much was owed the elder, Love asked Knowledge, another elder, "**Who Helped me?**" "**It was Time,**" Knowledge answered. "**Time?**" asked Love. "**But why did Time help me?**" Knowledge smiled with deep wisdom and answered, "**Because only Time is capable of understanding how valuable Love is.**" **Love transforms our intentions and desires.** The real test of love is how we respect others. No one can be a friend of Jesus if one does not love one's neighbour. Jesus loves the Father, and only does what is pleasing to him, even though the Father's will leads Jesus to embrace suffering, rejection, and death. He endures this agony so as to bring us the gift of resurrection and eternal life. If we love Christ, then we necessarily wish to do what is pleasing to him. And what is that? Our faith, hope and love; our obedience and our humility; so also our selfless service to him for those who are materially, morally or spiritually needful of our attention and support. As Pope Francis said in his Lumen Fidei §27, "**True love unifies all the elements of our personality and becomes a new light that points to a great and full life.**" Amen.