

5th Sunday of Easter 2022

I once knew a man who treated his wife abominably. He would belittle her in company, was jealous when she was engaged in friendly conversation with other men and did little to contribute to child rearing and housework. When challenged he said, 'Oh she can take it. She knows I love her.' The fact is he didn't love her and his love was just just empty words.

Jesus in St John's Gospel exhorts the disciples to 'love one another as I have loved you. By this all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.' Wow! What a challenge and what a standard to live up to. So how did Christ love? First and foremost he HUMBLISHED Himself to be one like us and then HUMBLISHED Himself more to death, death on a Cross. Furthermore, he gathered the disciples in community and it was in that context he encouraged them to love one another. Jesus showed them by example what he meant by love: no judging; no condemning; always forgiving; breaking down barriers of prejudice and discrimination; going out to the outcasts and marginalised and bringing them into the fold; touching the untouchables with care and compassion; taking burdens from people's shoulders with uncompromising mercy. I was struck in the episode of The Chosen when Jesus calls Matthew to be an Apostle and Peter protests that he was calling a sinner to the inner circle. Jesus replies, 'Get used to DIFFERENT!'

St Paul with Barnabas, in today's First Reading from Acts of The Apostle, is overjoyed to reach Antioch and proclaims that The Gospel had been preached to The Gentiles. It was fitting that it was in a non-Jewish city in Syria that he announced that The Good News had been preached in pagan territory. Such news would have been met with disdain in a Jewish town or city as Gentiles were considered unclean. Paul and Barnabas had understood that demonstrating Jesus' love would not make them popular and could lead them to imprisonment and even death. Paul admitted that he could do these things because 'it is no longer I that live but it is Christ who lives in me.' Paul was so clothed in Christ that his actions were Christ's actions.

In St John's Apocalypse, The Second Reading in today's Liturgy Christ the Bridegroom proclaims 'I make a NEW creation. God lives among His People.' This again is a challenge for The Church, the new Bride of Christ, to make Christ present in the world with a love which is faithful, everlasting and creative.

Do people recognise us as disciples of Christ or do we do and say nothing that distinguishes us from the secular society we live in? Do people see me as a HUMBLE disciple willing to suffer for my Lord and God? In my community do I try to love as Christ loved or do I gossip, judge, condemn and cast stones I have no right to throw? Do I hold lifelong grudges even stating publicly that I can't and won't forgive? Do I reach out to the untouchables, the marginalised, the outcasts and welcome them to my community? Do I pile more weights on people's shoulders failing to even try to understand their situation quoting rules and regulations rather than seeing the person in need in front of me? In short do I accept Christ's challenge to 'get used to different' and accept the new order in a 'new creation'?

If I say YES to even one of these then it is no wonder that people do not see me as a disciple of Christ but more like the man who protested his love for his wife with empty words and actions that made a mockery of his marriage vows. Yes, it is true we are all weak sinners but let's not make that an excuse for not trying.