

GOSPEL

Matthew 15:9-17

Jesus said to his disciples:
'As the Father has loved me,
so I have loved you.
Remain in my love.
If you keep my commandments
you will remain in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's commandments
and remain in his love.
I have told you this
so that my own joy may be in you
and your joy be complete.
This is my commandment:
love one another,
as I have loved you.
A man can have no greater love
than to lay down his life for his friends.
You are my friends,
if you do what I command you,
I shall not call you servants any more,
because a servant does not know
his master's business;
I call you friends,
because I have made known to you
everything I have learnt from my Father.
You did not choose me,
no, I chose you;
and I commissioned you
to go out and to bear fruit,
fruit that will last;
and then the Father will give you
anything you ask him in my name.
What I command you
is to love one another.'

REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

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During this Easter season, the Word of God continues to point out to us the styles of life that are consistent with being the community of the Risen One. Among these, today's Gospel presents us with Jesus' instructions: "abide in my love" (Jn 15:9): to abide in Jesus' love. To live in the flow of God's love, to take up permanent residence there, is the condition to ensure that our love does not lose its ardour and boldness

along the way. Like Jesus and in him, we too must welcome with gratitude the love that comes from the Father and abide in this love, trying to avoid being separated from it by egoism and sin. It is a demanding project but it is not impossible.

First and foremost, it is important to realize that Christ's love is not a superficial feeling, no; it is a fundamental attitude of the heart which is manifested in living as he wishes. In fact, Jesus states: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (v. 10). Love is fulfilled in everyday life, in attitudes, in deeds. Otherwise, it is only something illusory. They are words, words, words: that is not love. Love is concrete, every day. Jesus asks us to follow his commandments, which are summarized in the following: "that you love one another as I have loved you" (v. 12).

How can this love which the Risen Lord gives us be shared with others? Jesus has many times pointed out to us who the "other" to love is, not with words but with actions. It is the person I encounter on the street and who, with his face and his story, challenges me; it is the one who, with his very presence, compels me to leave my interests and my certainties behind; it is he who awaits my willingness to listen and to walk a stretch of road together. Openness towards each brother and sister, whoever they may be and whatever their situation, beginning with those who are close to me in the family, in the community, at work, at school.... In this way, if I remain united to Jesus, his love can reach the other and draw him to it, to His friendship.

And this love for the other cannot be reserved for exceptional moments, but must be constant in our lives. That is why we are called, for example, to safeguard the elderly like a precious treasure and with love even if they cause economic difficulties and inconveniences, but we must safeguard them. This is why we must give all the assistance possible to the sick, even in the final stages. This is why unborn children are always to be welcomed; this is why, ultimately, life is always to be protected and loved, from conception to its natural end. And this is love.

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We are loved by God in Jesus Christ who asks us to love one another as he loves us. But we cannot do this if we do not have his same Heart within us. The Eucharist, in which we are called to participate every Sunday, has the aim of forming the Heart of Christ within us, so that our entire life may be guided by his generous attitudes. May the Virgin Mary help us to remain in Jesus' love and to grow in our love towards all, especially the weakest, so as to correspond fully to our Christian vocation. May our Mother and the Mother of God help us to be in harmony with the Word of God, so that Christ may become light and lodestar throughout our life. Let us entrust to her the holidays of all, so that they may be peaceful and fruitful, but above all the summer of those who cannot go on holiday due to impediments of age, to reasons of health or of work, to economic restrictions or other problems, so that it may be a time of eased tension, gladdened by the presence of friends and of happy moments.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: What does it mean to be "loved by God"? How does one "abide" (stay) in this love?



Heart: We can all experience being wounded in different ways by our "brothers and sisters". How can we stay "open" as Pope Francis beckons us?



Hands: What are some practical ways we can ensure that our love is constant and not reserved for "exceptional moments"?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.