

Homily: 5th Sunday of Easter: Cycle C: 2022: Acts 14: 21-27; Ps. 145; Rev 21: 1-5; Jn
13: 31-33; 34-35

“True Love”

“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

How do we know what true love is? It is not a simply a feeling or a desire of the human heart, but rather it is to will the true good of the other: *which is communion with the Blessed Trinity and all that leads to it.* The Scriptures today give us a good sense of what this true love involves.

1. In the Acts of the Apostles today, by St. Paul and St. Barnabas exhort us to **persevere in the faith** remembering that, *“it is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.”* In our “feel good” culture we need **this reminder that this life on earth is not Heaven, but is a spiritual battle and a pilgrimage through the ups and downs of this life.** Yes, we must learn how to love in a Christian way. It doesn’t come automatically and usually involves suffering of some sort. Why? Well, the Christian way is the way of **self-giving love** which requires us to die to ourselves and our selfish desires and to want what is **truly good**, as defined by God through the Commandments and teachings of the Catholic Church, for ourselves and others. Concerning purity, for example, do we truly love our boyfriend or girlfriend if we pressure them to compromise their morals before we are married - and not look out for our true good which is to help one another to get to Heaven someday? To resist the temptation, which can be very strong, and to practice chastity involves dying to self – but it’s worth it to get to Heaven and avoid Hell. The same goes for a **married couple** in which one of the partners manipulates or pressures the other into immoral activities of the flesh and/or using contraception/sterilization, when these are objectively grave sins; in those cases the couple is morally required to learn the Church’s teaching on holy purity within marriage and to follow **Natural Family Planning** (see: www.ccli.org and www.learnNFPonline.com) - if there is/are an objectively serious reason(s) to space out having the children God wants to bless the couple with - which respects both God’s teaching in this area and each

of the partners in the area of intimacy. **Receiving the Sacrament of Confession regularly can help us overcome these sins of the flesh as well as other serious sins.** We all need to realize that to love God, the true objective good, and others is not primarily in our feelings, and that this goes against the world's understanding of "love." The Christian way of love is truly counter-cultural at this point in history esp. in the area of purity – which makes it more challenging to embrace but also more beautiful. How do we embrace this way? *We enter into the way of Christian love first in our intellects by discovering the true good for ourselves and others made known to us by God and the Church, reflect upon it regularly, and then by God's grace choose the good in our wills.* That's why studying our Catholic Faith is a life-long project; we never graduate from learning more about it – receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation is not graduation. And to remember that all the trials and challenges of earthly life are either ordained or permitted by God's holy will for our sanctification and eternal good, but we will only benefit from that reality - if we in docility respond more and more like the Blessed Virgin Mary did at the Annunciation to God, "*Let it be done to me as you say.*"

2. To **grow in Christian self-giving love**, we also must make a conscious effort to let go of as St. Paul says to not sadden the Holy Spirit, all bitterness, strife, anger, jealousy, envy, hatred, foul language, desire for revenge, judgmentalism, etc. towards others, and instead seek to be kind, patient, sympathetic, forgiving, magnanimous (big hearted), humble and self-giving in relation to our fellow human beings (see **Letter to the Ephesians, 4:30-32**). This is obviously an ongoing process (it doesn't happen overnight!!), and yet daily we should be making progress in virtue with the help of the Sacraments, esp. the Eucharist and Confession and daily prayer and act of penance/spiritual sacrifice. The true test always of whether we are growing in the likeness of Christ, i.e., holiness, or not is: are we growing in love of God and neighbor? To be able to see God in other people is not easy much of the time in this "valley of tears", but if we make the effort and pray, pray, and pray some more for that grace, it will happen over time. **Christian love must be the motivating force for all that we do in life.**

3. **But if we persevere** in trying to live the way of Christian love, which is not based on simply what we feel, but rather what we know from our Catholic Faith is good for ourselves and others, and choosing it despite our feelings, then through this real death to self **we will rise to new life in Christ**, which begins even in this world. And someday by undergoing these trials of spiritual purification faithfully, it will culminate in entering into the New Heaven and New Earth promised in the second reading from the book of Revelation today: *Behold God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be His people and God Himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away. The One who sat on the throne said, 'Behold I make all things new. Jesus is preparing an eternal place for us in His Heavenly Kingdom, but the key to enter in is embracing the way of Christian love.* May we all grow in this self-giving gift on a daily basis through the prayers of Our Blessed Mother as in the Church we honor her in a special way during this month of May, please make a resolution to pray the Rosary daily - if you don't already do so, and as a family if possible; make it a spiritual priority: praying esp. for the conversion of hardened sinners. And let's daily ask our Lady with a humble and pleading heart to help us imitate her total Fiat (Yes) of self-giving Christian **love toward God** (*accepting the offer to be the mother of the Messiah in blind trust*) and **neighbor** (*her first act after the archangel Gabriel left was to make the long journey to go help her elderly cousin St. Elizabeth in her pregnancy with St. John the Baptist*), ***"I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say."*** Let's say and pray to have that same spirit of docility to the Lord on a daily basis with Mary's help, and then to live it well with the constant aid of God's grace, so we all can someday join Her in God's Heavenly Kingdom. God bless you.