

Easter 5 - C

Living in Love:

Helping Families Grow Closer to Christ and Each Other

St. Matthew's Church

18 May 2019

Dear brother priests, and dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

The good Lord has conferred us with a great blessing by inviting us to offer this Eucharist with him. I am especially grateful to Life Restoration, guided by Heather and Jake Khym, and to our Office of Life, Marriage and Family for organizing this event. I certainly hope that it is the first of many such gatherings. The family, when it is solidly anchored in faith and living in love, sacrifice and mutual giving is a true “domestic Church.”

“In the Gospel we do not find discourses on the family but an event which is worth more than any words: God wanted to be born and to grow up in a human family. In this way he consecrated the family as the first and ordinary means of his encounter with humanity.”¹ Because the Son of God chose to enter this world of ours in a way meant for all children – that is, in a family – God himself sanctified the reality of family life.

¹ Benedict XVI, Angelus (31 December 2006).

It is his presence that allows our families to live closely with Christ. Our families are holy, therefore, not because each member is necessarily perfect – undoubtedly, they are not – but because the Lord revealed to us the family’s “wonderful vocation and mission of being the living cell not only of society but also of the Church.”² By living family life in love we grow closer to the Lord Jesus as we grow closer to one another.

Gospel

Today’s Gospel, then, tells us that love – a certain kind of love – is at the heart of the family because it is at the heart of all Christian discipleship: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:34-35).

But why, we might ask, did Jesus call this commandment of love “new”? Through Moses, the Lord God had said to the people of Israel: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself” (cf. Lev 19:18; Dt 6:5). But “the Old Testament did not present any model of love; it only formulated the precept of love. Instead, Jesus gave himself to us as a model and source

² Benedict XVI, Angelus (31 December 2006).

of love”³ Moreover, “The law commanded people to love their brothers and sisters as they love themselves, but our Lord Jesus Christ loved us more than himself.”⁴

Jesus showed us the novelty of his command and how far the love he asked for surpassed the older conception of love: “Love one another, Just as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34).

To understand the full force of these words, we have to consider how Christ loved us.

The Love of Jesus

In Jesus, we have seen and come to know the greatest love possible. one which is both human and divine. Think of his love. God’s own Son became what you and I are: bone and blood, mind and muscle, ignorance and insights, weaknesses and worries, desolation and death, disappointments and joys.

No other person has ever loved, nor will ever love so many people with such intensity and passion as Jesus Christ. Whether lepers or paralyzed, prostitutes or possessed, Samaritans or Canaanites, fishermen or Roman soldiers, their sex or status, their ethnicity or their age didn’t matter. All that did matter was that Jesus loved them and placed them in

³ Benedict XVI, Homily, Turin (2 May 2010).

⁴ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *On John’s Gospel*, 9.

his Father's hands.

You might think, that was easy for Jesus. Wasn't he the Son of God? Indeed he was. But he was also human, like you and me in all things but sin. That is why he became tired and thirsty, why he wept over Lazarus and Jerusalem. That is why he sweated blood in Gethsemani and begged his Father to let the cup of suffering pass from him.

How, then, can we sum up Jesus' love? Let's use the language of "gift." He made a total gift of himself – not only to his Father into whose hands he commended his spirit, but to you and me as well. He held nothing back; he kept nothing for himself. He was all for the Father – and all for us.

We, of course, cannot exactly reproduce Jesus' love, just as we cannot reproduce his life. But we are called to follow his example. We are his disciples, followers.

Is It Possible To Love?

But before saying a little something about *how* to love as Jesus did, I think it is helpful first to recall something about love itself. Everybody feels the need to love and to be loved. In the penetrating words of St. John Paul II: "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and

make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.”⁵

We need love; we yearn for it. We have “the new commandment” – and it tells us to love. This is not an impossible demand by an exacting God. No! He has himself shown us the way; he asks nothing more of us – but also nothing less! – than what example he has shown us: self-giving love.

Therefore, despite all the difficulties, we believe that love can permeate family life, a love that is authentic, faithful and strong; a love that generates peace and joy, not anger and jealousy; a love that binds people together and allows them to feel free in respect for one another, not one that divides.

Experiencing God’s Love First

How is this possible? First of all we must experience, know, that God loves us individually, personally, by name. We have to know what it is like to be loved in order to love. We can say with Scripture, “Christ loved me and gave himself up for me” (cf. Eph 5:2). Each of us is loved personally by God with a passionate and faithful love, a love without limits. Knowing that we are *first* loved by God frees us to love as Jesus did.

⁵ St. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

Freed for Loving Our Neighbour

Now we can love as Jesus loves us. And this love takes shape first of all in the family. “Christian love always possesses one quality: concreteness. Christian love is concrete. Jesus himself, when he speaks of love, tells us concrete things: feed the hungry, visit the sick. They are all concrete things for indeed love is concrete. When this concreteness is lacking we end up living a Christianity of illusions, for we do not understand the heart of Jesus’ message.”⁶

It is in the family that this love first shows itself as concrete. Before concluding I want to mention one way that families can truly live in love. It is a question for you. How good are you at forgiving those closest to you? in your family?

We all need Jesus’ help to walk beside one another in trust, to accept one another each day, and daily to forgive one another. It is so important to know how to forgive one another in our families because we all at times hurt others, whether intentionally or not.

Do you remember these words of Pope Francis?

We all make mistakes and on occasion someone gets offended in the marriage, in the family, and sometimes – I say – plates are smashed, harsh words are spoken; but please

⁶ Francis, Morning Meditation (9 January 2014).

listen to my advice: don't ever let the sun set without reconciling. Peace is made each day in the family: "Please forgive me" and then you start over.⁷

A family where its members ask for forgiveness and grant it readily is one where trust and love, peace and harmony, can flourish and be the foundation of a joyful life. The family should be the first place of mercy, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.

Conclusion

In the Eucharist which we now continue, we share in Jesus' love for us "to the end." Let us pray that this celebration will strengthen us to accept his love and, in return, to love, especially in the family, as he did – and as he commanded: "Love one another. Just as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34).

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

⁷ Francis, Address to the Participants in the Pilgrimage of Families during the Year of Faith (26 October 2013), 2.