

# Homily for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

May 18-19, 2019

Readings: Acts 14:21-27; Revelations 21:1-5A; John 13:31-33A, 34-35

Preacher: Deacon Duncan Harris

How do we love?

Jesus wants us to rethink who we love and how we love. This is not a trivial question; rather it is a provocative one. Who do you love? What bounds do we place on our love? Do those we love need to earn it?

The setting for today's Gospel from John is intimate, Jesus is sharing a meal with his beloved disciples who he lovingly refers to as his children, even knowing they will abandon him on his way to the cross.

The command to love may not sound new. In the Old Testament in Leviticus we hear, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." So is this what Jesus is saying at the last supper? What makes Jesus' new command radically different is that as disciples we are called to a self-sacrificing love, the kind of love Jesus demonstrated. This love is not just for those we call neighbor, friend, or family. We are called to reach out and love all, including those that may seem unlovable, the outcasts, the neglected.

It can be difficult to love those who are not like us, who don't love us back. How can we extend love to those who are different from us, those who make us uneasy? This kind of love is new and it is dangerous, it calls us to reach beyond ourselves and our comfort zones.

I would like to share an experience I had while volunteering at Dimitri House, which is a shelter for homeless men. I and many volunteers need to be wary of the idea that when we help, it is a one-way path. We can think we are there to serve others and that's all. It is laudable that we want to serve others and God does indeed call us to reach out to those in need. But we are also called to allow others to give mutually.

At Dimitri House, the men arrive between 8 and 9:30 PM. As the men gather, the volunteers put out some simple foods for a light meal and try to take some time

to talk and engage with these men and learn more about them, their families, and the trials of the day that they have experienced.

On this particular evening, a guest I will refer to as Mark, dressed in tattered clothing, came in with a beat up guitar. He and I were talking and he suggested that he play for all of us. I didn't know what to expect but I asked the other men and they somewhat reluctantly agreed to hear him play. I helped gather the men together in the common area in a circle, hoping I wouldn't regret this decision. Mark started playing and singing beautifully. I could tell the other men were surprised by Mark's musical ability.

After a few songs to get everyone warmed up, he played Amazing Grace with great spirit. All the men joined in singing, for me this was a powerful and enlightening moment. Mark was ministering to me and to all those gathered. He played from his spirit of faith. You could feel his love for the other men and God's love pouring out in song and into this community.

God wants us to love like Mark! He had no money or material things he could share, but he shared what God asks of all of us. He shared of himself deeply. He shared with others he didn't know. He loved deeply those some others find hard or impossible to love.

Jesus' command to love one another is not to be taken lightly. This command may be the hardest of any of God's commandments. It is much easier, not to steal or kill, than to love someone we don't agree with or like. This command of love means that we need to reach out to those who are the other to us, those we don't agree with or know, and those on the margins of society, those who are ignored and much different from us.

Living out this kind of love is hard and surely has a cost, but has a reward beyond all measure!

*"As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.  
This is how all will know that you are my disciples,  
if you have love for one another."*