

“Love one another, as I have loved you.”

Illustration

There’s an old Jewish saying, from a wise rabbi, that goes: “Ten strong things have been created in the world. Rock is hard, but iron cleaves it. Iron is hard, but fire softens it. Fire is powerful, but water quenches it. Water is heavy, but clouds bear it. Clouds are thick, but wind scatters them. Wind is strong, but a body resists it. A body is strong, but fear crushes it. Fear is powerful, but wine banishes it. Wine is strong, but sleep works it off. Sleep is strong, but death is stronger. And yet love delivers from death.”

There was a news story a while ago about a mother who pushed her baby’s pram out of the way of an oncoming truck. The mother was killed; but her child lived. This was a split-second decision, yet one that demonstrated the power of love, and the willingness of true love to be self-giving and self-sacrificial. The mother would be remembered for this act; her child would grow up not knowing her mother, but knowing that her mother had loved her.

Gospel Teaching

We have a problem today when we hear the word “love”. Yet the problem lies in the way that we use the word itself. The word today tends not to use it in the same sense as the New Testament writers do. We trivialise it, talking about loving chocolate, or loving our favourite football team, pop group or TV programme. Popular music is filled with words about love, but usually the meaning is sentimental.

So when we read, in the first letter of John (I John 7-10), that God is love; and that when our Gospel today (John 15:9-17) begins by talking of the love the Father has for Jesus – “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” – we may wonder what this all means. The love within the inner relationship in the depths of the Trinity is, of course, beyond our understanding; but it’s certainly not a trivial or sentimental love. In fact it is a love that is deep and self-sacrificial.

John’s letter tells us that God the Father’s sacrificial love is shown through the activity of the Son: “God’s love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away”. Jesus has often been called “the man for others”; and he showed that generous love for us supremely on the cross. Accepting crucifixion was clearly not trivial or sentimental. It was a tough, brutal, self-giving act of love on the part of Jesus.

And Jesus calls us to make that standard of love our own. “Remain in my love,” he says – that same love that is in the heart of the Trinity, that same love that is demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus. “Love one another, as I have loved you.” Jesus is calling us to live that love for others: that love that we saw demonstrated a few short weeks ago when he washed the feet of his friends; and then supremely when he offered his life for us on the cross.

Application

This is the love in which we are called to remain all our lives. This is a love that reflects the true meaning of the word; not something that is trivial or sentimental, not just an emotion that is simply an internal response to some external stimulus. When we are called to Christian love, this is something different and has little to do with our emotions.

To remain in Jesus' love is not to sit back and enjoy peace of mind and a sublime state of equilibrium that is untroubled by all that passes by. It is not a self-indulgent sense of the certainty of our own salvation without reference to anyone else. Jesus calls us to love as he did. That means a love that does not concern itself with our own wants, our own desires, our own emotions; it means a love that is willing to give of ourselves, a love that does not count the cost, a love that is extended even to those we would not normally want to love. That is, truly, a love that is stronger than death.

If we can learn to show this love, then we too become people for others, just as Jesus was. So let us pray for a deeper commitment in our lives to that true Christian love that does not just inwardly desire but outwardly gives.

The Living Word
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