

You may have difficulty interpreting the word “glorify” which occurs several times. It is a biblical term indicating the victory of God’s power. It is significant that “hallowed” in the first petition of the Our Father means the same thing.

The strange sounding place-names of the first reading and the exotic symbolism of the second reading might seem far removed from our every day lives as we sit in the familiar church pew on a Sunday morning. So is there any point at which we can connect with these texts? If we have ever heard a homily or read a story which gave us new heart, or if we have ever been moved at the sight of a tear being gently wiped from the face of someone in sorrow, then these readings can speak to us. For they are all about encouragement. All of us from time to time need to know that we are not on our own, and we need also to be reminded that any words of encouragement that we can find for another are rarely wasted.

We say, ‘love made him’. Parents say – ‘I hope they find friends who will bring the best out of each other’. Mauriac writes- “To love someone is to see a miracle invisible to others.” The example of Jesus can help us at times when it can be hard to see goodness even in those we love.

Real love heals. Only love makes the best out of the worst. In concentration camps the survivors were often those who had love to remember or go back to. Even when things go very badly in life, the forgiveness of love can help us move forward.

Encouragement - hope - love

As the drama of the gospel proceeds, it becomes clear that the high point of this revelation of divine glory in the human flesh of Jesus will come about as he is ‘lifted up’ and dies upon the cross. This death – at one level a work of human violence and treachery in extreme degree – represents at a deeper level the free outpouring of divine love for the human race. Jesus ‘glorifies’ God in death in that he reveals the very being of God to be love (1 John 4:7, 16), becomes ‘transparent’, as it were, to the divine love (John 3:16). The retrospective (‘has been glorified’) and prospective (‘will glorify’) statements of Jesus in the gospel encompass a total process whereby both in his human life up till this and now, climactically, in his imminent death, God will be revealed as love.

The ‘new commandment’ given to the disciples – that they are to love one another, ‘just as I have loved you’ – flows essentially from this. It is ‘new’ in the sense that it is called for by the new set of circumstances that is fast approaching. After Jesus’ death and return to the Father, the community will no longer have the physical presence of Jesus to make the divine love palpable in their midst. Their own, equally palpable, love for one another must instead take on this role. If this high

requirement is fulfilled, if they do indeed love one another after the pattern he has set, then this will signal to outsiders that they are truly his disciples.

As so often, then, in this Fourth Gospel, we have in the community's understanding of itself the full sweep, so to speak, of Incarnation: the love which the members experience from one another, is an extension of the love they have received from Jesus, which is itself an extension of the divine love, reaching out to share eternal life with the world.

The **Second Reading**, from the Apocalypse, 21:1-5, depicts the sense of divine presence in the community in very different but complementary way. God's work of redemption, something which continues until the final triumph of the Lamb, represents a 'new creation': new heaven, new earth and new city of Jerusalem (the community) in which God will be 'at home' with God's people. What is presented is a glimpse of a future reality. But the depiction of it as 'descending' from heaven communicates the sense that its realisation is already under way here and now: the life of the present toiling, suffering and struggling community is indeed the 'new creation'.

On a more historical level, the **First Reading**, from Acts 14:21-27, describes a further stage of the expansion of the community as Paul and Barnabas consolidate the mission to the Gentiles and bring back a report on this to their base church at Antioch.

An essential part of being a follower of Jesus Christ is a willingness to love. How many times have we heard with our ears and our hearts the words in today's Gospel passage, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other."

These are, of course, words of our Lord, given not as a suggestion or an option, as something to embrace if we feel up to it, but as a real mandate, a challenge to put into practice day in and day out until our final breath. Easier said than done, we probably will readily agree.

It is good to remember that the teaching of Christ is not a philosophy or a theory, but a way of life, a way of love, manifested in words and deeds. "Love one another, as I have loved you," is the basic teaching of Christ, and that is our work, challenging as it may be and even a cause of suffering and death.

The words and deeds of Christ teach a path other than violence, hatred and revenge, and we are called to inculcate the example of our Master in our daily lives. We may ask: how did Christ love? First of all, without counting the cost, even as it led to suffering and death on the cross.

Christ lived and died for others and never ignored the cries of the poor and the needy. Christ cured the sick, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead, and

pardoned sinners. In other words, Christ willingly shared in the sufferings and joys of the people around him. Christ's guiding principle was, "Do not judge and you shall not be judged; do not condemn and you shall not be condemned."

Christ could understand and hope in others, even when there might be cause for discouragement or despair. Through self-giving love Christ shared our human condition completely even to the extreme of suffering and dying for those he loved.

The love of Christ was and is a constant and generous donation of self. Before giving his life on the cross, Jesus gave his Body and Blood at the Last Supper as a perpetual gift to those able to believe in him and embrace his teaching and example of "no greater love than to give one's life for one's friends," realized perfectly in his existence.

The call to each of us is to imitate Christ day by day. It is not always easy to know just what to do in given circumstances of life, let alone have the courage and strength to put into practice what we sense we are called to do. But we are promised the abiding presence of God's Holy Spirit, alive and active in the Church, in her Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, and in our lives, assisting us in our struggle to do good. Even when we fail sometimes or often, we are not to give up in our efforts.

We cannot truly love if we lack open ears and hearts to the needs of others. We might see the speck in the eye of others and refuse to help them, when in fact we are missing the beam in our own eye. Following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, we are called upon to show genuine interest for the welfare of others, even those whom we may find no attraction toward. Blessed Charles de Foucauld called himself a "universal brother," and that should be our goal as well: a brother or sister to all those in need nearby or far from us.

Looking more closely at the scripture readings assigned to the fifth Sunday in Eastertide, we first of all see the realism of Saints Paul and Barnabas in their missionary activity, taking to heart the words of the Lord, "anyone who wishes to come after me must take up his cross." As Christ had to die and so enter into his glory, so also every follower of Christ.

Suffering, in all its unattractiveness, is part and parcel of the Christian vocation. Tribulation leads to the kingdom and by our suffering we also become partakers

in the glory which Christ won for us by the shedding of his blood. This was the experience of Paul and Barnabas as well and meant to be ours too.

The reading from the Book of Revelation, the second lesson for this Sunday's Mass, speaks of Christ as Lord of the universe ordaining the course of history toward the final victory of, "a new heaven and a new earth." This means a new creation which will last for ever, a life of endless fellowship with God, an end to all sorrow and finding unbounded joy in God's presence. This takes place with the fellowship of believers, in communion with all the angels and saints of God.

In the meantime we disciples are to carry on Christ's messianic love. We must show to those entrusted to us by God, that is, everyone with whom we live and meet, a love extended to the sacrifice of our own good and life.

As disciples in the service of Christ, we are called to never give up doing good, for the spread of God's Kingdom on earth. This is the consequence of the Sacrament of Baptism that we have received as infants or at some other stage in our life, that invisible but indelible belonging to God and God to us. In this we are united with Christ through thick and thin.

This Sunday's Gospel message, from Christ's Last Supper Discourse, certainly is applicable to our times and lives. The Lord invites us to forget ourselves and thereby find our true self, totally dedicated to God and others without counting the cost or shrinking back in fear.

May the Lord enlighten our minds and hearts to be on fire for the things of God, today and always.

Short passage; big message. Love one another. Love one another. Love one another.

Any

questions?

This is how I once heard a preacher describe these few verses from John's gospel, which

begin a long stretch of scripture called the Farewell Discourse and where we find Jesus' final words to and prayers for his disciples.

In John 13 Jesus has washed the feet of the disciples and is preparing them to carry on the

movement after he is gone—and this short passage with a big message is the "new commandment" Jesus gives his followers to embody. But it turns out the "love one another" part of this commandment isn't what's new. As my dear friend Rev. Alan

Sherouse reminded me, the commandment to love goes back much further than Jesus of Nazareth. Before Jesus spoke the commandment gathered around that last night with the disciples, it was rehearsed throughout the Jewish tradition. Many of the disciples knew it, read it, prayed it, and committed their lives to it. The commandment to love one another was familiar to them—old, not new—that is until the qualifying phrase: “As I have loved you...” Now that part was new—Just as I have loved you, you also should love another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Short passage with a big message. An old commandment with a new meaning.

After losing his job in 2010 amateur photographer, Brandon Stanton, moved to New York and began an ambitious project: to photograph 10,000 New Yorkers on the street and create an exhaustive catalogue of the city’s inhabitants. Armed with his camera, he began crisscrossing the city, covering thousands of miles on foot, all in an attempt to capture New Yorkers. Somewhere along the way he began to interview his subjects in addition to photographing them. He asks one of two questions, which seem to open the doors into people’s lives: “What is your greatest struggle?” or “Give me one piece of advice.” Alongside their portraits he includes quotes and short stories from their lives. Brandon’s portraits and captions became a blog “Humans of New York” and now the project has over 20 million followers on social media.

One of the Humans of New York helped Brandon understand his project is really about the power of stories. She was older woman photographed with wisps of grey hair sticking

out from a furry cap, with a little bit of mascara under her wrinkled eyes, and fuzzy umbrella in the background. She said,

“When my husband was dying, I said: ‘Moe, how am I supposed to live without you?’ He told me: ‘Take the love you have for me and spread it around.’”

Isn’t that just beautiful? Take the love you have for me and spread it around.

How are the disciples supposed to live when Jesus is no longer with them in body?

This is what Jesus commands the disciples to do: Take the love I’ve shown you and pour it

out in the world. “Just as I have loved you...you also should love one another.”

In fact Jesus gives no other ethical imperative in the Fourth Gospel—no turn the other cheek or walk a second mile or give away your cloak. Just love one another.

Jesus hopes to live on in the world in the love of his followers—not just their love for him,
but their love for one another.

“Take the love I’ve poured out for you, the love you’ve felt from me, and pour it out in the world.” Pour it out on the people around you—strangers and friends. From the cashier at the grocery store to the difficult family member. Take the love I’ve shown you, and extend it to the people around you. Every day. In every interaction. To every creature in every place. Take the love you’ve known through me, and give it away again and again and again. And you’ll never run out of love like that. And your life and the life of your community can’t help but point to God and God’s Way of Love.

[Story on Sam, WaWa, someone in line paying for person behind them. See video]

Then a church member told me they were in the drive through at Starbucks when they read in our church newsletter about the gift cards being distributed, which prompted this

family to pay for the order of the person behind them in line! It was like a cascade of generosity and love was pouring out into the world.

But sometimes love is harder than this.

Every week at the end of worship I say this as a part of my benediction to the congregation: “go to join in the work of God in your every day living.

Go to dream with God about what is possible in the face of the impossible.

Go to love deeply and unreservedly even when love is hard to come by.”

Certainly, the disciples found themselves in lots of places in which love was hard to come

by following Jesus’ death. They were fearful, anxious, concerned about how they would carry on the message of Jesus and if they would be persecuted.

You and I don’t have to think long or hard to know the places in our lives or world in which love is hard to come by—in our relationships with co-workers or family members, when we’ve been disappointed or hurt by someone, in our politics, and even in some corners of our churches.

In the disciples’ best moments and ours, we remember how we are supposed to live even

when or especially when love is hard to come by—we remember the new part of the new commandment: “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

Henri Nouwen wrote, “If we wait for a feeling of love before loving, we may never learn to

love well. Mostly we know the loving thing to do. When we ‘do’ love, even if others are not able to respond with love, we will discover that our feelings catch up with our acts.”

The kind of love Jesus commands of the disciples is the defining characteristic of God and

Jesus' life—it is also the defining characteristic of the Christian church—to show God's love to the world in every way we can think of. To keep the currency of God's love moving around in the world long after that last night Jesus had with the disciples. To be vectors of the love we've known in Christ and to embody it in our daily living—our texts and emails, our calls and connections, in our interactions and in our difficult conversations—this is the new commandment for us.

St. Jerome, one of the Latin Church Fathers, wrote about how John in his old age would remind those around him to love one another. When he was asked why he said this so often, he replied, "Because it is what our Lord commanded. If it is all you do, it is enough."

A short passage with a big commandment. An old commandment with a new meaning. "As I have loved you." Living the way Jesus lived, Choosing love even when love is hard to

come by. Extending love when people are unlovely. Taking the love God has for you and pouring it out, giving love away again and again. For it is enough. If it is all we do, it is enough. It is generative. And it is our life's work.

This big new commandment would be enough to sustain the disciples as they figured out

how to live after Jesus was gone. And it is enough to sustain us through challenging times. Each time we choose love, we bear witness to God's all-encompassing and radical

love for all the world. May God give us the grace to allow such love to be the defining characteristic of our lives and our communities. Amen.

—Courtney Allen © 2019