

Love does – 18/09/2016

“If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet..” (John 13:14)

Beloved in the Lord,

A man dreamed that he had been given a chance to visit Heaven and Hell.

When he opened the door to Hell, he was surprised to see a banquet hall set for a feast. On the table were mouth-watering dishes of food, but the diners sitting around the table were moaning in agony. Each diner had only a very long spoon to eat with. The spoon was long enough to reach the dishes in the middle of the table, but too long to manoeuvre to their mouths. So they cried in hunger.

When he opened the door to Heaven, he saw the same banquet setting: a table filled with wonderful dishes of food, surrounded by diners with the same long spoons. But here the diners were happy and enjoying the meal. The difference: in Heaven they were using the spoons to feed each other.

A spirit of service is a mark of a follower of Jesus.

This little story illustrates how love serves other people. Love does not think about itself but others. The farther people drift away from God, the less likely they are to serve. Love is a verb. Love serves.

Jesus gave His disciples a very powerful example that night when He shared the last Supper with them. It was the night before His crucifixion. We heard in our reading today, how Jesus girded Himself with a towel and washed the disciples feet. This was a job normally reserved for the lowest servants. Jesus humbled Himself in order to provide a powerful lesson to His disciples. When He had finished washing their feet He said to them:

“You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.” (Jn.13:13-15)

Clearly Jesus is telling us that we are to follow in His footsteps, to follow His example. Does that mean that we are to literally wash one another’s feet? Of course not, but what it means that we are to serve one another in love.

Love serves. Love does something. Love sees a need and fulfils it. Love is action. Paul very powerfully describes love in his first letter to the Corinthians. We are familiar with this passage, but I think that we cannot read it often enough. Somehow we quickly forget the message. He writes: ***“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not***

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take into account a wrong suffered, ⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. (1.Cor.13:1-8)

You see love is much more than just a nice feeling. Love does. I wish to emphasise verse 5 in particular: **“love does not seek its own”**. Love is not out for its own good or benefit. Oh, how we must engrave this truth upon our hearts. This stands in stark contrast to the way people live and think today, where we live in such a narcissistic society. Most people ask “what can I get out of it?”

Love doesn't ask “what can I get out of it?” Love does not seek its own benefit or good. Love serves the other person not expecting anything in return. This type of love is often misunderstood, misinterpreted, and maligned. People will question your motives if you have sacrificial love. A good example is found in an event in Jesus life involving Mary Magdalene. We read in John 12:1-8:

“Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. ³ Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, *said, ⁵ “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?” ⁶ Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said, “Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. ⁸ For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me.”

From the other Gospel accounts we know it was not only Judas who questioned Mary's motives and criticised her for “wasting” this precious ointment. Mary loved Jesus. Jesus had saved her and delivered her from demon possession. She had experienced the love of God firsthand and she wanted to show her gratitude. She anointed Jesus feet as a token of gratitude, and expression of her love. She was not concerned with the cost of the ointment, she simply did what was in her heart. Jesus understood and was grateful and blessed her.

Another good example is the good Samaritan. Not only did he help the stranger on the road to Jericho, he paid for his recovery. You see true love does not count the cost. It simply meets the need. Love does.

This type of love does not come naturally. This type of love emanates from a heart that is in a right relationship with the Heavenly Father. We are not talking about religion, because religious people are often the most unloving people. No we are talking about relationship. Those who have a right relationship with God through Jesus, love. When we have

surrendered our lives to God through Jesus, when we daily submit to His will and His ways then we truly love, because it is His love that flows through us.

God is love. If we are in Him then His love flows through us. If it doesn't, if we do not love with His love then we need to check if we are in Christ.

Jesus said that a tree is known by the fruit that it produces. A good tree bears good fruit. He also said that love was the sign of our being His. He taught: ***"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."*** ³⁵ ***By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*** (Jn.13:34-35)

You see love is not an option – it is a commandment. We are commanded to love one another, as Jesus has loved us. Jesus love for us was and is perfect. He said that greater love has no one than to lay down his life for his friends. Not only did Jesus say this, He did it!

He died in our place. He took our punishment, so that we would not have to suffer the penalty for our sin. He gave Himself for us. His only reason for doing so was love.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (Jn.3:16)

So great was His love for us. How great is our love for Him? We can measure it by the degree that we are prepared to serve others. Jesus did not hold anything back. He gave it all for us, loving us. How is it with us? How much of our life is dedicated to serving Him and how much do we withhold? We need to commit to total surrender, not partial. That is not easy because more or less we are all guilty of wanting to do our own thing. The thing is though, that the more we give the more we receive. We soon learn as we pour ourselves out for God that it is truly more blessed to give than to receive.

There is so much that each one of us can do. We just need to do it. Jesus said that whatever we do for the least of His brethren we do for Him. Pick up the phone and have a chat with a lonely person. There is no shortage of lonely people around us. Go and visit someone in hospital or a Nursing Home or aged Care facility. Bake a cake. Do something for someone expecting nothing in return. Don't seek thanks, just do it. It is worth it.

Let us ask God to show us what we can do. May our hearts be in tune with Him. May we love as He loves. A good prayer to pray every day is the prayer of St. Francis:

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.***

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