

3rd Sunday Easter (C)

- Some months ago at Sunday at Mass there was a couple in the front pew with their two children & the father was holding their new-born baby along the length of his arms with her head in the palms of his hands & resting on top of his legs as he sat.
- I was deeply moved by the way he couldn't take his eyes off her & I could imagine his thoughts of amazement & wonder, of a quiet joy & pride, but even more, he had this loving gaze of total commitment & no doubt, of the deepest desire for the best possible future for their baby.
- It sent me into imagining the deep love with which God gazes upon us & the yearning God has for us into the future.
- And I was thinking about the deep love God has for us expressed in Jesus & the way he must have had a loving gaze as he addressed Peter in today's Gospel.
- The word 'love' is one of the words which we use all too easily nowadays.
- Precisely because of this, it is a word that has been greatly worn out.
- But the communities of John, the writer of today's Gospel manifested their identity & their own intentions by this word.
- John is the one who in his letters & Gospel speaks about love often.
- To love, is above all, a profound experience of relationship among people - a care & concern for the other over oneself, as well as the expression of being with the other in joy, sadness, suffering, growth, renunciation, dedication, fulfillment, gift, commitment, life, death.
- All these together are summarized in the Bible in one single word in the Hebrew language. This word is hesed.
- It is hard to translate into our language, but generally, in our Bibles it is translated by charity, mercy, fidelity or loving kindness.
- The communities of the Beloved Disciple sought to live this practice of love in a very radical way.
- Jesus revealed this in His encounters with people with sentiments of friendship & tenderness.
- In this love, Jesus manifests His profound identity with the Father.
- For His communities there was no other commandment except this one: "to act as Jesus acted".
- This presupposes love of all that God loves, all that God has created & that is expressed in the way we live out that love for others.
- That is the basis of the Church – a community in loving relationship with God which lives out that relationship in the ways that its members extend that genuine love for all people & the universe that God created.
- The dialogue of Jesus & Peter can be imagined as expressed to you personally - the question Jesus asks of Peter: "Do you love me?" is addressed to each disciple, to each of us.

- Christianity is not an ensemble of teachings & practices; it is something much more intimate & profound.
- It is a relationship of friendship with the person of Jesus Christ.
- Many times during his earthly life he asked people: "Do you believe?" & never "Do you love me?"
- He does this only now, after giving us proof of how much he loves us in his passion & death.
- But then Jesus makes love for him consist in serving others: "Do you love me? Feed my sheep."
- The love extended to Peter by Jesus is now what Jesus asks Peter to extend to his followers – his sheep.
- This has implications for us as well.
- Our love for Christ should not be something private & sentimental but should express itself in the service of others, in doing good to others.
- Pope Francis said: 'We, the women & men of the Church, we are in the middle of a love story & each of us is a link in this chain of love, & if we do not understand this, we have understood nothing of what the Church is.'
- We are all held in the loving gaze of the One who first loved us.
- That is what enables us, personally & as a Church, to respond: 'Lord, you know that I love you.'
- Being such a central commandment in the life of the community, love is defined by John as follows: "This is the proof of love that He laid down His life for us & we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." Our love should not be just words or mere talk but something active & genuine."
- Anyone who lives this love & manifests it in words & attitudes becomes a Beloved Disciple.
- It is in the Eucharist that we can we can have that love deepened.
- May the love you experience from God be the love you extend to others; may you reach out to the wounded in the world, heal them with compassion & may you always feed on this food that strengthens you for life, enables you to be lovers & to make a difference to our world.