

THE HOMILY OF THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR B

WHAT I COMMAND YOU IS TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

I stumbled into the write-up titled ***Christians in the World***, by an ancient writer, *Diognetus*, last week; being ad rem to today's theme, I decided to share it with you. *The different between a Christian and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, language or custom. They neither invent any special language nor evolve another culture for themselves, but live in the midst of other people, speak their language and observe their cultures and traditions. They conform their lives to the local culture they find themselves. But though, they live in their country, they see themselves as transients. They see foreign land and motherland and motherland as foreign land. They obey the prescribed laws, but in their own private lives they transcend the law. They show love to all men and all men persecute them. They are misunderstood and condemned yet by suffering death they are quickened into life. They are poor but make others rich; lacking all things but having everything in abundance. They are dishonored, yet made glorious in their very dishonor; slandered yet vindicated. They repay calumny with blessing and abuse with courtesy. For the good they do, they suffer stripes like evildoers and under the stroke they rejoice like men given new life. The Jews assail them as heretics and the Greeks harass them with persecution yet of all their ill-wishers none can produce good ground for their hostility.*

Christianity is built on love and to love is be blind to the misdeeds of the one loved, to be able to endure persecutions, degradations, calumnies, poverty, injustice etc of any kind from and for the one loved. Diognetus, compared the relationship between a Christian and the world to that of the body and the soul. According to him, what a soul is to the body, a Christians is to the world. The soul is spiritual just as the Christian are not spiritually-minded hence they live as strangers in their very fatherland. The body is corporeal and materially minded just as the world is so much engulfed in materialism, basing its activities on the material worth. The soul is the life of the body, so body is lifeless and useless without the soul. Yet, the body hate the soul because the latter does not allow the former to gratify itself with excessive pleasure, rather directs it to the higher good; so Christians are hated by

the world because the former acts as the conscience of the latter and keeps troubling him when he goes wrong.

To love is to be stupid in human reckoning and that is what every Christian is called to do. To love is to offer service without expecting appreciation for it. It is to accept derisions, endure persecutions and even suffer death for the sake of the loved one even when the latter did not recognize or appreciate it. In the second reading today, St. John enjoined on us to reciprocate this abundant love which God has shown to us, by loving our one another. According to him, since God is invincible, we can only express our love for Him by loving our fellow men/women since our love for God can only be demonstrated by the way and manner we love our neighbors. When we do that, God will live in us and His love will be complete in us. God is love, the apostle concludes, and anyone who lives in love, lives in God and God lives in him.

In the gospel Jesus was so emphatic in His message of love. This was to underscore its importance. What I command you is love one another. Earlier in the same gospel of St. John He called a **NEW COMMANDMENT**: New because as against the a tooth for a tooth and eye for an eye that was taught by Moses, He was bringing in a new message of true love which is completely ignorant of revenge. Rather than revenge, He would tell us to offer the wicked man no resistance. Love was so emphasized in today's gospel as if Christ was saying, 'you may ignore every, or all other commandment(s) if only you will hold unto love.' Or saying that the only commandment that counts is love as every other one is meaningless without it. Just anyone of them finds its meaning and effectiveness in love. Hence He said 'what I command you is, love one another.' The apostle Peter says that love covers multitudes of evil. Jesus in the passage quoted above did not just command us to love one another, but He gave us the quality of love that we should show to our neighbors. '...as I have loved you.' How did Jesus love us? 'No greater has any man than to lay down his life for his friends.' Meaning that we must keep loving until we are crushed to death. We should allow nothing to remain of us but allow ourselves to be consumed as a holocaust. Our love for our neighbors must know no bound. In another passage He said that it is by this type of love that people will know that we are His disciples. This is the quality of love He is inviting us to show to our

neighbors. This is the way to reciprocate Him. This is the price we necessarily have to pay for being Christians. It is a love without qualification, an unconditional love; not loving someone because he/she is a Christian, loveable, kind, holy, of the same religion or denomination with me, male, female, color, race etc. but loving the person simply because he/she is the creature of the God you so much loved and treasured.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul made a perfect description of what love is and what it is not. *Love bears all things and endures all things. Love, he said, is kind, it is never boastful, never jealous or deceitful. Love is never rude, it never seeks its own advantage; it does not take offence or store up grievances. Love does not rejoice over the misfortunes of others but rejoices in truth.* If we look closely at Paul's description of love, we will have a close idea of what Christ our master wants from us. If we will show love to our neighbors in this manner for the sake of Christ we will surely sweeten the earth, as its salt and brighten the world as its light. We must continue to love until, as Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, it begins to hurt. Even when love begins to hurt, probably because of lack of reciprocity from the ones loved, we should continue to love until we completely disappear in love and nothing of us is seen any longer except love.

Considering the qualities of love as mentioned above, it should be clear to us that it is a difficult task can only be achieved by grace and this grace can only be given to us by Christ Himself if we ask for it. Since love is the only effective instrument for combating evil in the world and as I said before we need grace to possess it; We must fall on our knees and ask God constantly for the grace to accomplish such onerous task.

The problem of the world is nothing other than lack of love. Many people have been disappointed that they cannot trust anybody any longer. Some have nobody to say to them 'I love you.' The world hungers more for love than for food, shelter and clothing because the presence of the former takes care of the latter. Many roam the street in search of peace and love. We Christians are the harbingers of them both and should make ourselves available to offer it to them.

I cannot think of any conceivable problem in the world today that cannot be taken care of by love. The promise of Christ in today's gospel is that if we are able to love, then we will be sure that whatever we ask the Father will be granted us. According to Him His purpose of sending us is to bear much fruit, fruit that will last but this lasting fruit is no other thing than love. There are three things that last, says St.

Paul, faith, hope and love and the greatest of them all is love, 1 Cor. 13:13.

If it is in the nature of the world to hate and they go about hating, it is in the nature of Christians to love, we should go on loving. Jesus need you and me to be used as instruments to bring love and comfort to millions of His injured, sick, rejected sorrowful and restless children scattered all over the world. What He expects from us is our yes and He will use us to accomplish great things.