

IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE

This past Friday, two days ago, was the solemn feast of the Sacred Heart. This feast is the last of three solemn feasts honoring God: The Trinity, Corpus Christi, and the Sacred Heart, all occurring on the successive three weeks after Pentecost. The feast of the Trinity honors the mysterious nature of God, three persons in one God. This is the most profound mystery we have about God. The feast of Corpus Christi, or in English, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, honors the Eucharist, both the Mass and the reception of Communion. The feast of the Sacred Heart honors the infinite love of God for every single human being he has created and will create. This feast is of relatively recent origin, going back only around one hundred years. As a young teen I remember the controversy among devotees of the Sacred Heart arguing that only a picture showing the heart was a true picture of this devotion. Chambers painted a picture of the Sacred Heart entirely different in that it simply showed a glow in the chest of Jesus, showing that his heart was on fire with love, so much so that the glow could be seen. The purists totally rejected this picture as being simply a fraud! I have difficulty in having a devotion to an organ I can see rather than a painting which shows clearly what the devotion is really all about, that is love, the fire and power of absolute love.

When one reads the four Gospels, especially the Gospel of John, one cannot help but note how often Christ talked about the necessity of one giving total love to himself and he in turn giving his total love to them. This is not exactly what leaders down through the ages demanded from their followers. Loyalty, yes, devotion, yes, but love? In many ways they did seek love from their followers, but not in the way Christ sought it. He very simply talked about the depth of his love, even dying to prove his love for others, which of course he did. He also talked about the power of that love which he proved by his death and resurrection. And after his ascension into heaven, his closest followers began to show their love for him in their actions, their deeds and above all in so many giving their lives for their love of Him. And one must not forget how often St. Paul wrote of the depths of his love for Christ and his teaching others to grow in their love.

The Gospel for this Sunday is a wonderful example of love in action. Christ was invited to dine with a wealthy Pharisee, a person who considered himself above the average person. He had heard of Jesus and was curious to meet him and learn more about him. He had heard of his teaching and of the miracles he had performed. Jesus accepted his invitation. The word immediately got out when and where Jesus was going and besides the other invited guests, there were many others peering from a little distance watching to see just what would happen. No doubt, this was not just a simple dinner; it was indeed a feast as one would expect from a wealthy person.

While they were reclining at table, as was the custom in those days, a "sinful woman" from the city entered the room. Tradition has it that this woman was most likely Mary Magdalene, a well known prostitute and most likely known rather well by many of the elite in the town. Being so well known she had little trouble in getting into the house and into the banquet room. (Remember Tareq and Micheale Salahi who crashed President Obama's first official state dinner at the White House six months ago! How they did it is still a mystery.) But here we have a known prostitute almost doing the identical crashing at a very uppity dinner. No doubt none of the guests wanted to admit they knew her; heaven forbid! But then she does

something which must have caused everyone to stop and look; she was at the foot of the reclining Jesus, kissing his feet, wetting them with tears and drying them with her hair! And then even more startling, she opens an expensive flask of ointment and anoints his feet, the scent permeating the entire room. One could slice the silence with a knife. Speechless, all present simply stare with open mouths at the scene.

Simon the Pharisee, host, wonders silently why Jesus, who appears to be a prophet, is allowing this to happen from a known sinner, and a prostitute at that! Quietly the silence is broken by Jesus as he answers the unspoken question of Simon: "Simon, I have something to say to you." Speak," Simon answers. Jesus then asks Simon to judge a certain case where two people owe money to a creditor, one owing five hundred days wages and the other owing only fifty. Neither could repay the debt so the creditor forgave them both. Jesus then asks Simon, "Which one of the two would love the creditor more?" Simon correctly says the one who owed the greater amount.

Jesus then gently chides Simon for not doing what a gracious host should have done: He did not bathe the feet of Jesus which was a courtesy generally given to guest in those days. Nor did Simon greet Jesus with a kiss nor did he anoint his head with oil, again common courtesies of the day. And then Jesus says something which could only have silenced Simon for the moment: Jesus tells Simon that this woman has done all the things which Simon had put aside as a perfect host would have done. "So I tell you " Jesus continues, "Her many sins have been forgiven because she has shown great love." Then turning to the woman he says: "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." One can only wonder and imagine how that woman, Mary, must have felt at that moment. The love that she had for Jesus was beyond words. It was total, sincere, absolute, and eternal, with no conditions nor expectations. It was perfect love.

After all this the feast took on a whole different atmosphere. Almost all wondered just how could Jesus remove sins? Just who was this Jesus? But one can also wonder just how sincere were all the guests at that feast? How open were they to acknowledging their thoughts, their feelings, even their sins? One might, or better, one should ask themselves just how would they have reacted if they were one of the guests at that feast. To actually see and feel true and absolute love in action, invariably provokes strange, deep feelings and emotions within one's inner psyche. It is wonderful while at the same time almost frightening to experience the power of love, the power of genuine and total love.

The love that God has for each and every single human being is beyond one's understanding, yet it is something that one deep within themselves wants so desperately. Why? Because that is the way God created human being to be, to love, to love their God and creator, and yes, to love themselves as God has created them to be. The message of Christ over the three years of his public life was basically all about love, true love, pure love, eternal love. That was what he said not just once but often that the two great commandments are to Love God and to Love one's neighbor. But understand the word commandment as not being just a law to be followed, a legalism, but rather as being an essence of what it means to be a human being and a follower of Christ. It is ultimately allowing God's love to actually become a part of one's total being, of one's total way of acting, of one's total way of living. Let God be for one the God he is, was, and will always be.

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