

5th Friday of Easter “Jesus Calls Us to Love”
Fr. Frank Schuster
May 15, 2020

We are still in the Last Supper Discourses in the Gospel of St. John. The Lord gives us his commandment to “love one another as I have loved you”. You may recall that in Matthew, Mark and Luke, the commandment to love is stated someone differently. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves. I spent much time in school, in philosophy classes, bible classes, and theology classes comparing these two versions of the commandment to love. What it always seemed to boil down to was, “loving my neighbor as myself” only works if I actually love myself in the first place. The synoptic Gospels just take that for granted, however, there are a lot of people who simply don’t love themselves like they should and as a result are not very good or successful at loving others. The Gospel of St. John fixes this. Here Jesus says, “Love one another as I have loved you.” Here, the bar is raised when it comes to the love we need to share with others. This is because we need to begin by reflecting on how much the Lord loves us and use that as the measure that we should love others. However, the head scratcher with John’s version is...how can our love for others ever match Jesus’ love for us? We obviously can’t measure up because he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. However, John offers us a better formulation of the commandment to love because loving others as Jesus loves us constantly challenges us to grow in our capacity to love.

What connects the Gospel of St. John with both the synoptic Gospels and St. Paul’s take on all of this is that, when you take everything in the bible and summarize the meaning of life, the very meaning of our existence is to love God and love our neighbor. As I have playfully shared before. 1 John 4:16 says God is love. Genesis chapter 1:26-27 we are made in the image and likeness of God who is love. What are called to do then? Survey says...love. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 that after everything else is taken away all that is left is faith, hope, and love and the greatest of these is love. And in today’s Gospel, Jesus commands us to “love one another as I have loved you”. And so there we have it.

Of course, there is one more head scratcher about John’s version of the commandment to love...in order to love others the way God wants us to...we have to let Jesus love us first. And maybe that is a good reflection for today. Do we really accept in our hearts that Jesus truly loves us? And if not, what is holding us back from that? Is our love for God like that of a slave, a love based on fear? Is our love for God like what Jesus is inviting us to this Gospel reading like that of a friend? This is better, however, even love based on friendship still operates under a rubric of reciprocity. When Jesus is resurrected, he tells Mary Magdalen to go tell his brothers. What if our love for Jesus was that of a brother, like family? If this was the case, then the love we are called to shouldn’t be based on fear, like a slave. It shouldn’t be based on reciprocity, like only a friend. The love we should have for God should be unconditional like we would have for family. What this means is, our love for others should be unconditional as well. Our love for others should be unconditional as well. What does that look like for us today?