

## Homily for Sunday, May 15, 2022 – Fifth Sunday of Easter



I suppose it is safe to say, or cliché to say, that the message of Jesus, the message of the prophets before him, and the message of the entire Bible, comes down to love. If it had to come down to one thing, love would be it. St. Paul tells us that when everything else falls apart, fades, and is no more, only three things will remain: faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love. Jesus himself says that we will be judged by one thing and one thing alone—love. I was hungry, and out of love or lack of love, you either fed me or let me go hungry. I was thirsty, and out of love or lack of

love, you either gave me something to drink or you let my thirsty continue. Love takes a myriad of expressions. St. Mother Teresa told us that we may not *all* be capable of great things, but we can do small things with great love.

Jesus says in today's gospel, **"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."** Jesus is telling us that the movement of grace is from God to us, and from us to others, not back to God. Notice Jesus never says, "love me in return as I have loved you." He says, "love one another as I have loved you." It is much more about paying it forward than trying to repay those we are indebted to. Besides, those that we owe the most to—God and our parents—know we cannot pay them back for giving us life and supporting us, nor do they expect it. Our task is not so much to pay them back, as it is to pass it on.

I liked the gospel reading a couple of Sundays ago, where the risen Lord appears on a beach and asks Peter three times, **"Do you love me?"** Peter responds three times that he did, to which Jesus says, "Well, if that's the case, then **feed my lambs and tend my sheep.**" As you all know, Peter vehemently denied his friendship with Jesus three times. Jesus did not say, "Do something for me, Peter, after all you owe me big time." The risen Lord did not see this encounter with Peter as payback time. Jesus didn't say, "Peter, do something for *me* to prove you really do love me." He said, "Do something for *others*. Go and feed my lambs and tend my sheep." Notice, the movement is not back to Jesus but forward into the world.

The movement is from God to us and from us to others, not back to God. Is love of God left out of this equation? Not according to Jesus, for he tells us that anyone can say, **"Lord, Lord,** but it's **the one who does my father's will**—the one who gets his/her hands dirty in the world of love--**who will enter the Kingdom of God.**" Giving God lip service and calling it love will never bring about the Kingdom. In fact, there's a greater chance it will be perceived for what it is--hypocrisy.

In Christianity, love of neighbour takes priority over love of God. Jesus tells us that if you are on the way to the altar to make an offering to God, that is, you are about to express your love for God, but remember that a brother or sister has something against you, at that point, you need to do something else. He tells us what we need to do. Leave your offering right where it is and *first* go and be reconciled with your brother and sister. Then come back and present your offering. “First be reconciled” means this should be your priority. What comes second is your offering to God.

As I said, it’s about paying it forward rather than trying to square up debts from the past. Perhaps that is the key to the story of the multiplication of the fish and loaves. With just five loaves and two fish thousands were fed. Maybe each person, out of a place of gratitude for having received food, simply passed food down the line, and one simple act of kindness created a wonderful dominoes effect until everyone was fed. As far as I know, nobody gave fish or bread back to Jesus.

Today we heard from John’s gospel. John tells us that we love because He first loved us. Love is God’s initiative. God started the dominoes effect; our job is to keep it going.

A little over 20 years ago, a popular book hit the New York Times best sellers list and remained there for four years. It was Mitch Albom’s first book, and it was called Tuesdays with Morrie. Mitch Albom was a Detroit sportswriter who became aware, in his adult life, that a former professor of his—who left a positive mark on Mitch’s life—was now dying a slow death from A.L.S. The dying man’s name was Morrie Schwartz. A coincidental strike at the newspaper where Mitch worked, gave him some free time. So, each Tuesday, Mitch hopped the train to Massachusetts to see his former professor. With each Tuesday visit, Morrie would drop another pearl of wisdom on Mitch’s lap. With each Tuesday visit, Morrie also became weaker and weaker. Upon Morrie’s death, Mitch Albom collected all these pearls of wisdom and created the best-selling book, Tuesdays with Morrie.

It was 2002, and I had just finished read Tuesdays with Morrie when I got the news that my own mother was dying of cancer back in the Ottawa Valley. Living in Sackville at the time and trying to run four churches, it wasn’t easy for me to take off to the Ottawa Valley to visit my mother, but I did manage it four times in two months prior to her death. At that time, I befriended a dying man in the Sackville hospital named Alex. He was a farmer, a bachelor, and exactly same age of my mother, 72. I visited him every Wednesday. I could have written my own book, not called Tuesdays with Morrie, but Wednesdays with Alex. Each time I got back from the Ottawa Valley, Alex would ask me how my visit had gone back home. We would chat about my mother, but we would mostly chat about how he himself was facing his approaching death. He dropped many pearls of wisdom on my lap. Just before my last visit home before my mother’s death, I visited Alex to tell him I would be away for a few days. Instead of saying what he always said, “Have a good trip” or “my prayers are with you,” he simply said, “I’ll see you on the other side of the river.” I wasn’t sure if he was hallucinating, or if he knew this would be the last time that

we would see each other. When I came back from burying my mother, I didn't find Alex at the hospital. He had died while I was away, the same day that my mother had died.

The point of this is simply to say that we can't always pay our mothers, our fathers, or God back. They may not be handy to us, especially if they've already crossed to the other side of the river. But we can pay it forward to those in our immediate world, Alex in my case. Knowing my mother, she would have said something like, "I know you can't be here for me. That's OK, but make sure you're there for Alex."

"Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." Tuesdays with Morrie.  
Wednesdays with Alex. Everyday with the Risen One in our midst.

*Fr. Phil*