

Greetings to you! The theme for this morning is that, 'God is love, and we can only know him if we ourselves show love to others.' In the New Testament reading that was read to us from John's letter, he exhorts people to love one another. He says that love comes from God. He claims that love is the indicator whether a person knows God or not. He goes to the extent of saying that the one who loves knows God, and the one who does not love, does not know God. In other words, God's concern is that the hallmark of any Christian community must be love. He then goes on to describe how God has showed his love amongst us. God sent His one and only Son into the world to die for us so that we might live. This love which God has shown is not because we loved him, in fact, on the contrary, while we were still enemies with Him God loved us by sending his Son as an atoning sacrifice for us.

Looking back on what God has done John exhorts the community to love one another. He goes on to say that no one has seen God, but if we love one another God lives in us and His love is made complete in us. By this John shows that God is the one who enables us to love one another by His living presence in our midst. This living presence of God in our lives is seen through the presence of the Holy Spirit whom God has given. John's premise is that when we love the people of God then we truly love God. These two loves are inseparable. Moreover, when we love God we will truly want to keep His commandments, which include loving our neighbour. In this passage John shows that living in love means remaining in union with Christ. He finds it difficult to distinguish love for God from love for neighbours. For him the two go hand in hand. John has also described three identification marks of a genuine Christian: Firstly the possession of the Holy Spirit (v-13); secondly, confession of Jesus as God's Son (v-14); finally living in love (v-16). These are the foundation blocks of an authentic Christian.

In the gospel passage from John 13, we see that Jesus gives a new commandment to His disciples. The context of this commandment is when He is in the process of fulfilling the new covenant. It is in the midst of the last supper where he has broken bread as symbolic of his body, and shared wine as symbolic of His blood, thereby establishing the new covenant. He then gives them a new commandment saying 'Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciple if you love one another.' This new commandment is to be the guiding principle for all those who are members of the kingdom of God. The passion, death, resurrection of Jesus not only allow for a new commandment but for new life. This offer of new life is a gift which God has given us in and through His Son Jesus Christ. The key factor in this commandment is that Jesus says love one another *as I have loved you*. His supreme example of love is seen on the cross where he gives Himself up for us.

The challenge for us as the people of God is not to dichotomize our love for God from our love for our neighbours. These two need to go together. Very often we are very pious and tend to show that we love God very deeply but on the other hand we do not care about our neighbours. By neighbours we mean anyone who is in need, like the widow, orphans, elderly, vulnerable and others who are oppressed by society and those within our community. May we as a Christian community truly love one another so that others would know that we are disciples of Jesus.

Shalom

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