

# Loving to the Extreme

Daily Gospel / Liturgical Cycle B

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Jesus said to his disciples: "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another."

Introductory Prayer: I believe in you, O Lord, in your great love for me. You are my creator and redeemer. I trust in your friendship; I trust that you will share with me all the insights and desires to love as you have loved. I love you, Lord, for you have loved me first. I want to love you by helping to bring your love and life to others.

Petition: With the love of your heart, inflame my heart!

1. A New Commandment: "And can love be commanded?" Pope-Emeritus Benedict XVI poses this very objection in his encyclical, "Deus Caritas Est." Love is not merely a sentiment; it is an act of will. "God does not demand of us a feeling which we ourselves are incapable of producing" (n. 17). We cannot be ordered to "like" someone or to "fall in love", but we can "choose to love" our enemies. More importantly, when we experience God's love for us, the joy of being loved leads us to want to respond to that love. And God has loved us first: "It was not you who chose me...." We experience his love for us as an ongoing reality each time we receive the sacraments, but also each time we reflect on the fact that he is keeping us in existence. This personal experience enables us both to understand love and want to share it.

2. Friends Forever: Like love, friendship is easily misrepresented in today's world, for it is more than convenience, mutual tolerance or mutual utility. Friends not only share love, they share secrets and intimate knowledge. Love leads "to a community of will and thought" (idem). I want to know what my friend is thinking and desiring so that I can share in those thoughts and even satisfy those desires. "The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself" (idem).

3. Chosen to Bear Fruit: Jesus' commands are few, but they all have to do with love: "Do this in memory of me"; "Love one another"; "Love your enemies"; "Go and make disciples of all nations", etc. The essential and urgent nature of this command of love is linked to the very mission of Christ. We are chosen and have been appointed to go and love others. If this love is authentic, grown from the vine of his love and great in sacrifice, it will bear fruit. The fruit which lasts, that for which he died, is an eternal life of friendship with God. What others most need from me then, is not material goods or consolation, or even my friendship, but an experience of God's love for them, namely, knowledge of Christ. "Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave" (ibid., n. 18).

Conversation with Christ: Dear Lord Jesus, grant me a constant, growing desire to live your commandment of love. Awaken in me an awareness of your ever-present love in my life. Let this inspire me to love without measure, without distinction of persons, without fears of losing all that is less than love.

Resolution: I will choose to serve someone today, not because I feel the desire to do so, but for love of Christ.