

## God's eternal love provides perfect example

Thomas Gumbleton | May. 17, 2012 The Peace Pulpit

I think to begin to get the full impact of what Jesus is teaching us today, it's helpful to go back a little way in this Gospel. During this same Last Supper conversation a few minutes earlier, Jesus had told his disciples, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to God but through me, and if you know me, you know God also. Indeed, you know him and have seen him." Then Phillip, at this point in the conversation, says, "Lord, show us God and that will be enough."

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Jesus said to Phillip, "What? Have I been with you so long and you do not know me, Phillip? Whoever sees me, sees God. How can you say, 'Show us God.'? Do you not believe that I am in God and God is in me?" Jesus shows surprise and disappointment. I think we have to reflect on this, remembering that Jesus was fully human like we are. He had been trying to teach his disciples over those two or two and a half years that he had been traveling with them in such close companionship, and he thought he had gotten across to them that he indeed is God.

Sixth Sunday of Easter  
 Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48  
 Ps 98:1, 2-3, 3-4  
 John 4:7-10  
 John 15:9-17  
[Full text of the readings \[1\]](#)

All of a sudden, he finds Phillip saying, "Show us God and then we'll be able to believe." Jesus says with disappointment and shock even, "Phillip, don't you know? Can't you see in me that I am God?" I think in his humanness, Jesus knows that he's at the very end of his life. He'll be executed the next day, so he is determined that before he goes, he needs to be sure these disciples know who he really is and what he has come to do, and that is to share his life as Son of God with all of us.

That's why he then goes on to tell that parable about the vine and the branches. "I am the vine and you are the branches." He wants them to realize from that that there are consequences. Here, he is saying, "I am God. You share my life." What are the consequences? As he tells us today, "Here is my one command. Love one another." It all comes down to that. In some ways, that seems very simple, doesn't it? Instead of worrying about the Ten Commandments and the 613 Commandments of the Jewish law, there is just one thing: Love one another.

Then, as he goes on to explain a little bit about what that means, we begin to see the challenge. Love one another as I have loved you, and greater love than this no one has than to lay down their life for their friends. The kind of love that Jesus is talking about is total, unconditional, unlimited love. This is love that is always going to be there, no matter what. It's unlimited, total and unconditional, and is willing to pay any price, even to lay down one's life for the one you love.

That's a very real challenge, but there is more to it than that, too. Jesus says, "I've told you everything God has revealed to me, so I no longer call you servants. I call you friends." What Jesus is saying is, "Look, there's this extraordinary quality now between you and me. I am the Son of God, and yet, you are my friends," because he has established this mutuality. "Everything I have learned from God I share with you." There is a mutuality, and that's what a real friendship means. That's what love means, not one lording it over another.

"I call you friends." It's mutual. That's amazing, if you think about it: God making us God's friends in Jesus. If we go to the other lessons today, we find out in the early church, the people understood this lesson from Jesus. They did come to understand what he was trying to get across to them at that Last Supper. In the letter of John -- this is written probably 50 or 60 years after Jesus has gone, so the community has had a long time to reflect on his words and try to live them out -- and John reminds them, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."

"How could the love of God appear among us?" he says. He reminds us, "God sent Jesus into this world that we might have life through him." A really key point that John makes enables us to understand how we can begin to love the way Jesus is asking us to: "Love one another as I have loved you." John says, "This is love, not that we loved God, but that God first loved us." That's something that we need to try to take in deeply. We don't just choose to love God. God already loves us.

God has loved us into existence. God has loved his whole creation into being and God sustains us every moment of our lives because God loves us and first loved us. If we can begin to grasp that, take that in and let it really sink into our awareness, then there is no other response than to love God in return when we realize what God has done by first loving us, then we will love God and we will begin to love God. Then, as a consequence of that, too, John says, "Dear friends, if such has been the love of God for us we, too, must love one another."

That's why Jesus says, "My one commandment is that you love one another." There's probably no more appropriate Sunday upon which we should dwell on these readings or readings like this than a Sunday when, here in the United States, we celebrate Mother's Day, because I'm pretty sure that most of us, almost all of us, the first time we really began to experience unconditional love was when we realized how much our mothers loved us.

There is a beautiful passage in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah where God is compared to a mother. We think of God as a father most of the time, don't we? Here, God is spoken of as mother. "Sing, oh heavens. Rejoice, oh earth. Bring forth a new song, oh mountains, for God has comforted God's people, and taken pity on those who are afflicted. Then the people might say, 'But God has forsaken me. My God has forgotten me.'" God says back, "Can a woman forget the baby of her flesh and have no compassion for the child of her womb?"

We know that would be impossible really in any kind of great, natural order of things. "Could a woman forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child of her womb?" Then God says, "Yet, though a woman forgets, I will never forget you." God is being presented to us as a woman who loves her child without limit, without condition and forever. It's an amazing reality.

So on Mother's Day today, we can use our mothers' love for each of us, every one of us, as a way to begin to understand how much God loves us. When we truly begin to understand how much God loves us, then it will become possible for us to love God as we ought. What's even more important for our everyday life is for us really to reach out and to carry out that one command that Jesus gives us: Love one another as I have loved you.

[Homily given at St. Hilary, Redford, Mich. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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