

From the PASTOR'S DESK



Perfecting Love

We read today's Gospel through the lens of the Incarnation. By becoming one of us, God has made it possible for us to relate to Him, not through fear, but through friendship and love. Anyone who fears cannot be perfected in love. Fear has to do with punishment. We love because God loved us first. God's love was expressed through the Incarnation, through His decision to share His life with us.

It is reasonable that Jesus identifies the commandment of love as the great commandment of the law: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.* There is no conflict, no competition between loving God and loving your family. However, the ties that bind us to Jesus are stronger than family ties.

Saint Paul refers to that bond in the second reading. The newness of life received in Baptism goes beyond earthly love, deeper even than parental love. Those who love their families know that there is no love without sacrifice. Parents sacrifice their time and resources to bring up and protect their children. We can see in this an image of the divine love itself: of Christ, who has sacrificed not just His divine status, time, and resources to save us, but even His very own life.

This passage from Matthew might influence the way we pray. When we pray, we shouldn't just ask for favors for ourselves and others. When we pray, we need to go beyond giving thanks for what we have received. When we pray, we must make sure to express our longing, our love, our friendship with God.

It is only when we love Him that we can deepen our love for others. It is only when we long for Him that we can choose our goals in life. It is only when our friendship with the Lord is strong that we can overcome any difficulties thrown our way. It is only when we love Him that we can carry our crosses.

Our crosses were not given to us to upset or destroy us. They are not tests determining if we are worthy of Christ. A cross is given to us so that through it the power of God can be manifested. The same power, the same love gives us the possibility of sharing in God's own life. The same love that is stronger than death transforms our lowly bodies into the pattern of Christ's own glorious body.

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