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**Church of St. Thomas More NYC**  
**May 15, 2022**  
**Easter 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Year C John 13:31-33a, 34-35**

We all know that the two great commandments of Jesus were “love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as you love your self.” Sigmund Freud once quipped, “It’s a good thing people don’t love their neighbor as they love themselves; because, if they did, they would never stop killing each other.” What he meant was that so deep can be the lack of love some people have for themselves, even, at times, the profound dissatisfaction they have for their lives, that they direct their displeasure, their anger, for what is not right about themselves against the people around them. The drama of one’s own failed expectations, cheated dreams, raw deals and remembered guilt is often acted out against others, so that their very resemblance turns them into scapegoats for one’s own personal sense of inadequacy or failure. If we cannot accept ourselves as we are, if we cannot live with our limitations, it is much more likely that we’ll turn on those whose behavior reminds us of exactly what we don’t like about ourselves.

In today’s Gospel Jesus reminds us of that it is only the way in which He loves--that way of loving that we are called to aim at, to approximate, as well--it is only this way of loving that will free us from our fantasies and our fears. Jesus says, “Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other.” What precisely was the love that Jesus showed His disciples that we are called to imitate? The setting in which Jesus spoke these words gives us an idea. It is His last supper with His disciples. He knows His death is imminent. He knows all but one will abandon Him. The passage begins with the words, “When Judas had left them.” Why did Judas leave? Judas went to the high priests’ home to seal the deal by which he would lead the Temple police to arrest Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. The lines following our text contain the words of Peter protesting that so great was his devotion to Jesus that he would lay down his life for Him. To which Jesus responds, “Oh yeah, before the cock crows, before dawn tomorrow morning, you will deny that you even knew Me three times.” The setting in which Jesus speaks of His love for His disciples is framed in His awareness of their betrayal of Him. In spite of all this, Jesus offers Himself to them. This is the kind of love we are invited to imitate—to care for others, without judging.

Today’s Gospel challenges us to ask ourselves, “What is the manner in which we love, accept, and esteem ourselves; what is the manner in which we love, accept and esteem others? Is not the pattern of our loving, of our acceptance, of our ability to

deal with what is repugnant, whether in ourselves or in others, all cut from the same bolt of cloth, so that we treat others basically the same way as we treat ourselves—in varying degrees with tolerance and compassion, or with rigid standards of performance and expectation? Don't we have a whole set of conditions, implicit or explicit, expressed or unexpressed, by which we judge who and what is acceptable? Those conditions may not necessarily be set by religion or faith, but by family, society, the world of advertising, our over-active imagination, whatever. These are the alleged benchmarks of success which, when attained, are supposed to prove I am somebody, I do count, I am OK.

The challenge of today's Gospel is can we love in the manner in which God loves, i.e., unconditionally, without any strings attached, without a list of non-negotiable demands? Do we even believe it is possible to begin to live and love in that way? In regard to ourselves, are we able to accept who we are at this very moment—not that we condone everything about our situations—but can we live with the darker side of our personalities, without having to resort to fantasies for compensation or escape? Will we then accept others only in so far as they buttress and support those fantasies, and reject them if they force us to look too closely at the truth of our lives?

For example, it sometimes happens that when two people marry, one or both may enter that union with a hidden and unarticulated agenda that includes as a major corollary the stipulation, "I will love you so long as things remain the same between us," or conversely, "I will love you so long as eventually you change some of the things I will tolerate for the moment, but don't plan to live with forever." What happens when the circumstances that surround that marriage change, either because of tragedy or success or simply the passage of time? What happens when one realizes that he or she has been given a script at the outset of their marriage for which they have not consciously auditioned, nor have the requisite talents to perform? Will they continue to love each other without a string of conditions attached, in the way Jesus calls us to love, and thereby empower each other to grow as individuals and as a couple within that relationship? Or will they love each other, only grudgingly letting go of their initial expectations, keeping a semblance of an alliance, so long as the very subtle trade in goods and services is maintained, without the tariff of an honest love?

Jesus says, "Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other." That unconditional, healing, compassionate love of God that took flesh in Jesus of Nazareth is the hope for our lives and for our planet. Our ability to live, to love in that manner, affects everything from our intra-psychic dramas to the complexities of the geo-political order. May this vision then become that which motivates us, and not the fears and guilt from which we try to flee. Then the words of

Jesus in St. John's Gospel will be ours, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Let us be honest with ourselves, and paradoxically, as we are easier on ourselves, we will be easier on each other too.