

When Pope Francis died on Easter Monday, he left a legacy that will be debated for many years to come. Some have complained that he went too far too fast, while others have shared a disappointment that he did too little too late. However, one thing is clear: Francis preached God's mercy. He once said this: You cannot conceive of a true Christian who is not merciful, just as you cannot conceive of God without His mercy. Mercy is the key word of the Gospel. We should allow ourselves to be embraced by the mercy of God, who waits for us and forgives everything.

Dare we suggest that love and mercy go hand in hand. In our Gospel reading this week, we hear Jesus talk about love. Judas has already left the Last Supper in order to carry out his betrayal, the crucifixion clock is ticking fast, and Jesus knows His disciples are about to face the greatest challenge of their lives. So, He gets right to the point. There are no parables, no stories, no sermon. He gives us just one commandment. One simple, straightforward commandment, summarizing Jesus's deepest desire for His followers: "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

A New Testament scholar once wrote: "This new command is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and yet it is profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they understand it and put it into practice." G.K. Chesterton famously said, "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried." Imagine what would happen to us, to the Church, to this parish and to the world if we took this commandment of Jesus's seriously? What could we look like if we obeyed commands and practiced love and mercy without limit.

Love is the ultimate test of Christian witness. Our love for each other is how the world will know who we are and whose we are. Our love for each other is how the world will see, taste, touch, hear, and find Jesus. It's through our love that we will not only express Jesus to one another, it is the way that we will make Jesus relatable, possible, believable to a troubled world.

When we love one another, the Church becomes an ideal of life out of death, a model of how the old can be renewed. We actually become a present-day sign of the future new heaven and earth, when God will wipe every tear from our eyes where everything is new and the old order of things has passed away.

We are still a few weeks away from Pentecost. But spoiler alert: Jesus doesn't leave us on our own. He gives us a clear and beautiful way forward. The Spirit reminds us what Jesus said and did. Follow my example. Do what I do. Love as I love. Live as you have seen me live.

Weep with those who weep. Laugh with those who laugh. Touch the untouchables. Release the captive. Forgive the sinner. Confront the oppressor. Comfort the oppressed. Wash each other's feet. Tell each other the truth. Guide each other home.

It's easy to be a pessimist. But isn't it true – Christians are the ultimate optimists.

We are people of hope. People of faith. People of love. People of mercy. And if that ever slips our minds, maybe that Holy Spirit will nudge us to remember: By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.