

APRIL 9, 2023: EASTER SUNDAY



The heart of Christian discipleship is found in answering this one question: what does it mean for us to live a life of love? The whole meaning of Easter and how we live out Easter each day is discovered in this question. There are many misunderstandings about what true love is. For some it is simply letting people 'be who they are.' Acceptance of the person and leaving them as they are is *not* true love—it is laziness. Yes, we need to meet and accept people where they are, but true love challenges people to become the person God created them to be rather than who they want to be. Others will look to their feelings and believe that love is discovered in 'how I feel' but feelings without action is *not* love: love is only

discovered in and through our actions.

The cross of Christ is the ultimate expression of true love, for true love is not possible without sacrifice. If we are not ready to sacrifice ourselves: to die to our own self-interests, to die to our own desires and passions, then we are not ready to truly love. If we are not ready to serve another without counting the cost, without wanting to know the benefit it will bring me, then we are not ready to love. Love can never be found in desiring even that the one we love, loves us back. True love is only realized when it is unconditional, unmerited and unwarranted, and seeks only what is good for the other without expecting the other to respond in kind. True love is found when we are ready to offer our very self for the other to live.

When Jesus said yes to the cross, He took it up for us. He accepted it for each and every human being that ever existed or will exist. Jesus laid down his life *not* for his benefit: He did not need the cross—we did. If Christ had not died on the cross, then heaven would have been closed to humanity forever. Christ loved us to his death and in dying showed us that love is more powerful than death, for the cross is what makes possible the resurrection. When we die to ourselves, we realize the transforming power of God's love in the world. When we die to ourselves, we become the instrument that allows God's love to be seen. When we die to ourselves, we come to understand that we *truly* are made in the image and likeness of God. God is love and He has always chosen to love us, even when He knew that we might choose *not* to love Him back.

What we must see is that the cross is the only way to life. Love is *not* an option because our very nature impels us to be like God. If we are to be like God—and God is Love—then we must be love incarnate. When we choose *not* to love unconditionally (the only true love), we choose *not* to love at all. Once we seek a return on love, what we have is a transaction—not love. Love must be given freely and without expectation of a return. Christ knew people would reject Him and the cross and He died for them anyway. We must do the same. We must recognize that we really have *only* two options: to live in Christ or to live in death. We live in death when we choose *not* to live a life of love—when we choose to live a life that is all about self-esteem and self-actualizing, or self-anything. When our lives become absorbed with our own desires and passions, true love is not possible. And life without love is a living death.

The cross leads us to a life of love. It begins by recognizing our dependence upon God. All that Christ did, He did in response to God's will. He humbled himself and offered his very self, his very life, to the Father. We must unite ourselves with Christ, joining Him in his act of humility. It is in this moment that our lives come to be about God. Then, like Christ, we can empty ourselves of everything that is not about God, and create room for Him to fill us with his grace, mercy, and very presence. Once we become filled with the presence of God, we—like Christ—can give ourselves completely to the Father and say with Christ, "Into your hands I commend my spirit."

As we die to ourselves with Christ, we begin to experience the power of God's transforming love. We are ready to make real sacrifice. The true meaning of the word 'sacrifice' is to make holy, and to make holy means to make God present. We are then ready to rise to new life with Christ, where all of our relationships are grounded in our relationship with God and grow from that relationship.

When we love God first and above all, we can love others as we should. We can then look at people *not* for what they can give us but for what we can give them. We simply choose to love them for themselves with all their imperfections and brokenness, seeking to lead them to Christ to become the person God created them to be. The essence of love, then, is the road of discovering who we are in our relationship with God.

I pray that the joy of Easter will open you to experience the unconditional love that God has for you in Christ, and that you may come to share that love with all you encounter. May you become the presence of God's love that He created you to be. I wish all a God-filled Easter.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@theholyrood.org , or if easier please call or text me at (978) 254-0560.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Fr. Brian