

SUNDAY EASTER 06 – B (Homily 02)

“The Commandments To Love”

(Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; 1 Jn 4:7-10; Jn 15:9-17)

In one community where I was for Holy Week, I worked with one of the local catechists preparing a group of seven young couples for the baptism of their children that Easter. In the course of the evening I happened to ask how many of them knew the Great Commandment of Jesus by heart. I was perhaps more saddened than surprised to learn that not one person in the group knew the answer. They were all familiar with the Ten Commandments, but not one could tell me the Great Commandment of Jesus.

May I suggest that we learn and live, not just the Great Commandment of Jesus, but also the commandments of Jesus to love.

I suspect the movie The Ten Commandments is one reason why most people know about them. However, these commandments, while good and necessary to our faith life are limited because they are based on Law. Jesus went far beyond them in giving us his new commandment that bases the actions of his followers not on law, but on love.

I also suspect that one reason why so many people are not familiar with the Great Commandment of Jesus is that it is not as clear and simple as the Ten Commandments. The new commandment of Jesus comes to us in a variety of ways. It is found in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) in its basic form, than is expressed throughout the rest of the New Testament in other ways.

The Great Commandment as it is found in the Synoptics, commands us to love God with all our heart, mind, strength and soul, and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. That is the Great Commandment that according to Jesus contains the whole bible, all the Law and the prophets.

Then it gets more complicated. In this gospel, Jesus tells us to love one another as he loved us. In another passage, we are told to love our enemies. In Galatians 5:14, St. Paul asserts that the whole law is summed up in one single commandment, “You shall love your neighbour as you love yourself.” Then, in 1 Jn 3:23, St. John adds the dimension of faith to the commandment

as he tells us that we should “believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another as he has commanded us.”

Perhaps this is where the confusion lies for many people. This complexity gives us all the more reason to have a Sunday like this one to explore the depth of this new commandment of Jesus to love.

First, the commandment to love God with our whole being, and then to love our neighbour as we love ourselves is the most basic expression of the new Great Commandment of Jesus. Every Christian should know this Great Commandment by heart and hold it as a priority for living out their daily lives.

The other commandments to love, as I call them, found in the rest of the New Testament, simply spell out how we are to live out this most basic, new Great Commandment. All these other versions of the Great Commandment basically boil down to two main points: We are to believe in Jesus as the personification of God’s love for us, and we are to love one another as Jesus loved us.

Our belief in Jesus as God’s love made flesh among us is best expressed through prayer and worship. We must stay connected with that powerful, healing, life-giving love of God for us in Jesus through prayer. Jesus calls this “abiding in his love.” Every day we need to renew our relationship with this loving God. As Step 11 of AA advises us, we must strive to “improve our conscious contact” with God’s love for us through prayer and meditation.

We need to be like St. Peter who learned that he could not walk on the water alone. When he began to sink, Peter cried out to Jesus who lifted him up out of the water and then together, they walked back to the boat, with Peter hanging on to the Lord and relying on his power to walk on that water. What a powerful image for us. That is how we are meant to be walking through our daily challenges, not on our own power, but holding on to Jesus and relying on his power, especially when it comes to trying to love others as he has loved us.

To love others as Jesus has loved us means especially to sacrifice our own interests and desires for the well being of others. Jesus gave his life for us and we must be ready to give our lives in loving service to others, whatever

the cost. It also means to learn to trust others more. Jesus has revealed to us everything about the Father, and we must be ready to more fully reveal who we are to others in trust and confidence, as a way of building community.

To love others as Jesus loved us, especially, means to forgive. That is the best way that we can love our enemies, as Jesus did. On the cross, he was forgiving those who were crucifying him. So must we, with his power, the power of the Holy Spirit that fell upon the believers in the first reading and gave them the power to speak other languages.

We must find ways to express our feelings of hurt and anger towards those who hurt us with love, thus breaking the cycle of violence that engulfs our world. This is especially why the commandments of Jesus are called a new commandment, because they usher in a whole new way of being in this world when lived out as they are meant to be lived.

The *Returning To Spirit* program that has been spreading across western Canada is an example of a movement that is based on love. It teaches participants to deal with their past hurts rather than build up big stories around those wounds and carry anger through life. They learn ways to address their issues and then communicate their hurt to others with love as a way of letting go and moving on with their lives.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is an act of faith in God's forgiving love through Word and Sacrament. It empowers us to go out and live the Great Commandment in our own lives, to love God with our whole being, and love others as we love ourselves.