

HOM 4th Sunday 2019 C Feb 3

Last week I was struck by a 10-second video clip on the news. A father and his son were talking and the Dad said: *“There are a lot of haters out there. What are we going to do about them?”*

The little boy – no more than 9 or 10 years old – sheepishly answered: *“I don’t know.”*

The Dad put his arm around the boy’s shoulders and said: *“We’re going to love them,”*

The next day on my pastoral visits I saw a very bright and colorful poster somewhere that read: LOVE IS THE ANSWER TO EVERYTHING.

It surely is, and in today’s second reading, St. Paul teaches that without love nothing good can be realized. Listing some of the qualities of authentic love, he writes:

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.... Faith, hope and love remain... but the greatest of these is love.

Having heard all this, we still have to go to the author and source of love, not only to understand *perfectly* what love is, but also *to be able to love*.

God, of course, is the author and source of love. *“God is love,”* as St. John the Apostle and Evangelist wrote in his Scriptural letter. (1 John 4: 8,16) And since *Jesus is God*, we must look at Jesus’ words and actions to know what love is.

If we do that we cannot help but notice that Jesus’ words are sometimes stern or sharp and always uncompromising with regard to the truth. For example, in rebuking the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus says: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the kingdom of heaven before human beings. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter.”* (Matt. 23: 13) Nor does Jesus mince words when warning against sin, including sexual sin. In His Sermon on the Mount, He says with regard to lustful actions: *“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna.”* (Matt. 5: 29)

Jesus is also firm when teaching that divorce and remarriage is the same as adultery (except when the broken marriage was unlawful - Matt 5: 31-32), and his words are severe when He says that it would be better to have a millstone put around one’s neck and be thrown into the sea than to scandalize children. (Matt 18: 6).

Yet all of these words are spoken out of love for those to whom they are addressed. And when dealing with contrite sinners or anyone whose heart is open to Him Our Lord’s speaks and acts with great patience and compassion and mercy and even tenderness. He turns no one away who

turns to Him for help or forgiveness, and He exhorts all His listeners and disciples to likewise BE MERCIFUL.

What is most enigmatic – puzzling -- perhaps is that nothing God did **in the Old Testament** contradicts all this because God is, always was, and always will be love. And so, as strange as it may seem to us today, God’s flooding of the earth, His destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, His ordering of the slaying of the first born among the Egyptians, and His giving the Jewish People a special homeland and having them reclaim it by pushing others out is not incompatible with God’s love for all people, including those who were displaced or put to death by His will.

But we know that Jesus is the full revelation of God who is love, and in Him, we see what the substance of love is. It is seeking the true good of others – which requires us to love others as we love ourselves – and it is *doing God’s will at any cost* – which is how we love God who is all-good and sees the whole picture of life and knows how to lead all the willing to share in His blessedness – His happiness – His divinity.

So, in addition to teaching us that God is love, St. John the Evangelist also tells us that: “*The way we came to know love was that He (Jesus) laid down His life for us.*” (1 John 3: 16a). John then writes: “*so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*” (1 John 3: 16b) Here John was just teaching what Jesus Himself taught, namely, the New Commandment of Love.

“*I give you a new commandment*”, Jesus said, *Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.*” (John 13: 34) “*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*” (John 15: 13). And Jesus laid down His life not only for His Mother – first and foremost -- but also in equal measure for us and all who are sinners at least by original sin, and even for those who hated Him and tortured Him and put Him to death.

This laying down His life for the salvation of all the willing is what the event in today’s Gospel reading foreshadows. It is a continuation of last Sunday’s reading wherein Jesus goes into the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth, and after reading from Isaiah’s prophetic words about God’s Suffering Servant-to-come who would be *anointed to bring sight to the blind, liberty to captives, good news to the poor*, Jesus tells the people that He is this anointed servant of God – the promised messiah, the Christ.

He then says to them that a prophet like Himself is not welcome in his native place. In other words, Jesus points out to them that it was God’s own chosen people who did not welcome prophets like Jeremiah in our first reading – and who ignored or rejected or even killed them. And because of this, the prophets Elijah and Elisha brought God’s blessings to Gentiles.

The people in Jesus’ hometown synagogue were infuriated at Jesus when he said this. And in their attempt to kill Him, they demonstrated the truth of His words. Their actions pre-figure what the Jewish religious leaders and God’s chosen people-at-large would eventually do to Jesus. But the hour for this has not yet come, and so Jesus mysteriously passed through their midst and

went away. This affirms the freedom with which Our Lord would later offer Himself unto the Cross out of love for all people .

That self-offering of Jesus to the Father's will unto the Cross defines what perfect love for God is. And His self-offering unto the Cross *for our* salvation defines what perfect love for neighbor is.

But Jesus not only teaches us what perfect love is, He also enables us to love perfectly by offering us nuptial oneness with Himself in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood so that we can join Him – in Holy Communion -- in loving God and our neighbor perfectly unto the Cross and Resurrection.

And this really is the ANSWER TO EVERYTHING. It is what we need to do about hatred in our world – and about those who hate God and Jesus and the Church or us or those we hold dear. **We need to love them into heaven** -- with words of rebuke and stern words about the truth and about sin, when needed. (*And by the way, how refreshing it would be to hear some of our bishops warn the Governor of New York about the loss of his soul unless he repents of his support for legal abortion even up to the moment of birth – with a gala celebration no less -- or likewise the Governor of Virginia for his support of infanticide*).

But we also absolutely need offer ourselves to and with Jesus unto the Cross for their sanctification and salvation.

The Blessed Mother did this with Her Son, and she will help us do the same. Just invoke her intercession in this Eucharistic Self-Offering Prayer, saying it silently and sincerely at Holy Communion: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS, THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER.