

In so many ways our current culture continues to misunderstand what love is. One of the great errors of our day is the equating of love with self-fulfillment. In other words, to make the judgment that I love someone because they fulfill me, they make me feel good, they give something to me. And there is an aspect of this that is ok because love is reciprocal; we do gain things from those we love: good feeling, joy, comfort. But the error of our modern culture is to equate love only or principally with receiving. Sometimes as soon as a person feels they are no longer receiving what they desire, they move on.

But Jesus today reminds us of the true nature of love, that at its heart, authentic love requires self-denial, a self-denial which imitates Jesus Himself. “No one has greater love than this,” Jesus says, “than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” “Laying down one’s life” is at the heart of true love.

This is true most especially in our relationship with God. Week after week now since Easter, the Church has put before us the teaching of St. John regarding the connection between following the commandments of God and living in His love. Today is no exception. Jesus says in the Gospel “If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love” and “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

We all know that sometimes, even many times, keeping God’s commandments is painful. Faithfulness to God requires great self-denial on our part. But if our love for God is to be authentic, self-denial must be at the heart of it. In other words, loving God cannot simply be about seeking to feel good. A true relationship with God must involve self-denial because ultimately it is only through self-denial that we can do what God wants and in doing only what God wants we will find true peace and joy. So even when following God’s commandments seems to be asking us to do the impossible, it is in that moment that we must begin to understand the degree of self-denial that true love demands. Sometimes in our lives, truly loving God is going to mean doing something we really don’t want to do, or giving up something we really don’t want to give up. But true love of God with self-denial at its heart, even tremendous self-denial, does not disappoint. And through self-denial God can lead us to the heights of love for Him that we could never have imagined.

This is true also in our relationships with each other. It’s easy to love when it’s easy, but authentic loving means, as St Paul says,

- Being patient
- Being kind
- Not being jealous
- Not being pompous
- Not being inflated
- Not being rude
- Not seeking one’s own interests
- Not being quick-tempered

- Not brooding over injury

This is difficult enough with the ones we love, how about with those we don't! Think about someone you don't love, someone who's hurt you, someone you don't like, maybe even can't stand. Authentic loving means

- Being patient
- Being kind
- Not being jealous
- Not being pompous
- Not being inflated
- Not being rude
- Not seeking one's own interests
- Not being quick-tempered
- Not brooding over injury

Jesus layed down His life for those who hated Him, for those who spit on His face, for those who with hateful disdain on their lips mocked Him. Jesus asks us to do the same, to love, not just when it feels good, but especially when it doesn't. Only when our love has at its heart self-denial does our love become authentic. Otherwise, it is shallow and self-centered.

For all of us, our loves needs continual purification, but Jesus generously continues to offer us His purification and is always willing to teach us and empower us to love God and others as He has loved us.

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church on the 6th Sunday of Easter 2012.

