

Homily: Maundy Thursday 2022

If you know this song, you may want to say this with me:

We are one in the spirit we are one in the Lord,
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored,
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.

This is what you and all Jesus' disciples for all time have been told about following Jesus. You, they, all of us are to love one another. The disciples of Jesus time, the first 12 who had been told to love one another, were the first to hear it. They had been with Jesus for a few years, maybe. We do not know for sure. But they had stayed with him through every eventuality. They had been on the stormy seas, even those who probably vowed they did not want to go in boats and were definitely not cut out to be fishermen. Three of them, Peter, James and John, I assume Jesus had picked as potential leaders, had been allowed to be in the bedroom of Jairus' little daughter whom Jesus raised from the dead., and the same three had ascended the mountain and watched as Jesus was transfigured before them and saw Moses and Elijah appear and heard the voice of God say "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased; listen to him." Yes they were told to listen to Jesus. All his disciples the crowds which gathered around him listened to the stories, the parables Jesus told, and many heard Jesus say on at least three occasions that Jesus was to go to Jerusalem be arrested, be flogged, be put to death and then rise from the dead on the third day. But it is doubtful that any of them really heard it, or that if they did, they had no clue as to what Jesus was talking about.

The disciples were of course there that final evening in the upper room when Jesus organized their final meal together. Each of them, no doubt in horror, witnessed how Jesus took on the role of a servant and washed their feet, although only Peter voiced an objection. They heard Jesus tell them that he was giving them a new commandment; a command to love one another just as Jesus loved them. Jesus had shown what it was to serve with love by kneeling down on the floor in front of each man and washing his feet. He asked his disciples to do what he had just done, to love. That command might have been difficult for some of them to take on as their group included those who were very different from one another. There was a tax collector in the group and society ostracized tax collectors. But Jesus said they were to love one another. They were to remember that command every day of their lives just as you and I need to do, too.

Then during the meal, they watched as Jesus took bread; and when he had given thanks to God, he broke it, and gave it to them all, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me." When the meal; was over Jesus took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me." Jesus gave them all another commandment here – they were to do this, to share his body and his blood in remembrance of him. Did any of them understand what all this meant at that time, but the words were very powerful, and I expect they so absorbed them that they stayed with him forever. Form those disciples they heard two commandments one to love one another and one to share Jesus.

Then Jesus led them out into the night, dark, imposing and threatening. They walked to the garden of Gethsemane. J The three again were invited to go with Jesus and to stay awake while he went to pray. But none of them stayed awake. Three times Jesus went to pray and on returning found them sleeping. How guilty they must have felt. Suddenly a huge group of Temple police arrived led by – oh my goodness Judas, one of the disciples. Chaos, consternation and danger were everywhere. Oh no, Jesus let himself be arrested. You can imagine those disciples feeling their hearts thumping and their minds questioning "Why didn't Jesus use his miraculous powers and stop them? But I am sure fear gripped their hearts and they all fled the scene. Jesus their master, leader, teacher had been arrested - how that could happen? Jesus had spoken of love, and he was treated with deception, violence and injustice.

Those poor eleven disciples. Yes I am sure they loved Jesus but knew they had failed him terribly. They had listened and followed all the way to Jerusalem but did not understand what the passion of Jesus was to entail. How could they? But they stayed faithful despite fleeing from Gethsemane and hiding behind a locked door together, probably in the safety of that upper room. But once they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they were new men; Apostles pf Christ, sent to change the world, to share Jesus' Gospel of love.

I invite you this evening and in the next two days to think back over the times when you know you did not properly hear what someone said to you; when you know you got it wrong. Think back to those times when, because you got it wrong, your actions were inappropriate. Did someone suffer because of what you did or said? Think back and ask yourself, how did you feel? Were you able to confess what you did and somehow put it right? That is of course what repentance means – a confession with absolution followed by changing what you do so that you don't repeat the sin. But those are all theological terms. Saying sorry and finding a way to put things right are in ordinary language. And think back to the times when you shied away from being faithful to Jesus, when you did not speak up

as a Christian, when you metaphorically ran away. Jesus invites you tonight to think about those times and what you might do differently another time.

Jesus chose to let himself be arrested and then suffer all that they inflicted upon him, the physical and emotional abuse the torture and crucifixion. The authorities could choose to put him to death, but he knew because he trusted God that he would conquer death and rise to life on the third day. His sufferings were brutal; no man should ever have been crucified - executed in that barbaric manner. But Jesus was willing to be put to death; he gave his whole life for the people he loved, for all people, for you.

Now he asks you to show that love to all people too showing that love conquers death, and by your sharing of that love you show that Jesus lives in your heart today and every day. So that they will say of you, "We know you are Christian by your love, by your love. Amen