

DISCIPLES OF LOVE (Jn 15:9-17)

A kindergarten teacher had prepared what she thought would be a model lesson in Christian Discipleship. She had placed lots of time in planning the lesson which included a game, a song and a story. At the conclusion of the story, she asked for questions. With pride, she looked at her students wildly waving their hands. Obviously, the lesson had been a great success. The students were filled with excitement. Teaching seemed to be so rewarding. She called on a very enthusiastic little girl whose arm had been waving more frantically than the rest. "What do you have to say about Jesus and the disciples?" she asked. "Well," the little girl began, "I just wanted you to know that I know a lot about disciples 'cause at my house we disciple everything. We have a special disciple can for plastic, a special disciple can for glass, and a special disciple can for paper. My mom says discipling is how we save the earth."

That little girl's use of the word "disciple" was slightly misplaced, but her conclusion was right on target: discipling is how we save the earth. As Jesus said, "By this the world will know that you are my disciples, that you love one another."

In today's gospel we hear the word "love" 9 times. But this love which Jesus speaks about is not the romantic love so heavily peddled by Hollywood or romance novels. Yes, romantic love is essential in human development. But the problem arises when romantic love is projected, promoted and propagandized as the be-all and end-all, the goal, the pinnacle of life's experience. Romantic love is not the end, but merely a part of the learning process of true love. For example, a marriage relationship founded on romantic love must mature into something deeper if it is to endure. The romantic portrayal of the wedding ceremony as the "happy ending" is an illusion. Every person who has been married for even 2 weeks knows that it is only the beginning. Love comes from the daily giving of one to the other, the dying to self for the other. A successful marriage is a life of loving service to one another. Yet even a married love must go beyond itself in order to survive and continue growing.

For our life's goal is the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of Love, and marriage is simply one way in which we create love to reach our goal.

A young man was learning from a master artist who produced beautiful and inspiring stained glass windows. Unable to produce anything even remotely resembling the master artist's genius, he borrowed the master's tools. He thought that was the answer. After having used the tools for a while, the young man complained, "I'm not doing any better with your tools than I did with mine." To which the master replied, "It's not the tools of the master which you need, but it's the spirit of the master which you need."

We are only novices, apprentices, so to speak, in creating a world of love. But the more we practice the ways of our master, Jesus, the more we become like him.

Jesus has given us of his spirit when the Holy Spirit was brought into our hearts and our souls at our baptism and at our confirmation. And this Holy Spirit is renewed every time we kneel down to pray, every time we come before the altar to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, which he left us as a reminder of his love, and every time we admit our weaknesses and our failings in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and ask for his mercy and forgiveness for those times when we were not loving to others. As Jesus said, "... the Holy Spirit will teach you all things." It is up to us to listen to the Spirit and to do as Jesus commands us, "to love one another." This Spirit which we are given is the Spirit of Compassion, the Spirit of Forgiveness, the Spirit of Self-Giving, and the Spirit of Reconciliation, the Spirit of Love. Those are the ways in which we become Jesus' disciples.

We were at lunch the other day and our server was having a really stressful day. She had awakened late for work, and you know when you start the day off late, you never seem to catch up. Inside you feel constantly rushed and even minor irritations are difficult to handle. But it seems that on those days is when you get the most difficult and demanding customers. A friend that was with us noticed this and at one point complimented our server on the wonder-

ful job she was doing and told her what an amazing person she was. And our server got a great big smile on her face and stood up straighter and began walking with a bounce in her step. The Spirit of Compassion can lift someone out of the dung heap which they are temporarily in.

Three of our grown kids are going through separations in their marriages, and even as much as we are hurting from the broken relationships and broken families, they are hurting even more as they witness the death of a big part of their lives. Sometimes, no matter how supportive we try to be, something we say or do is not seen with the same eyes of love and understanding with which they were said or done, and the response back from their bed of pain can be very hurtful and out of character from our child. It is at times like that in which we are called, not to lash out, but to forgive and repeat the words of Jesus, "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing." The Spirit of Forgiveness and the Spirit of Reconciliation is needed to maintain the bonds of family.

To love as Jesus commands us is not always easy; at times it can feel like it's the last thing we want to do. After all, if I don't hold the other person accountable for their failings, who will? Actually, God will --- and I'm not God, although I find myself often trying to play God. I am simply called to do as Jesus has commanded me, to love others in compassion, in forgiveness, in self-giving, and in reconciliation. His command is to let his love, which has been so generously given, flow through me to others. That is the way of eternal life. Love alone brings God's kingdom into focus; love alone binds all things together; love alone gives purpose to pain, suffering and death; love alone makes sense of our existence.

We are the Master Lover's apprentices, disciples in the work of saving the earth through love. I can assure you that there is someone in your life right now who needs to know the love of Jesus which you alone can give them by your compassion, by your forgiveness, by your giving freely of yourself. Ask for the strength and courage which comes from the Holy Spirit and then go and do as Jesus would do.

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