

*Jesus said to his disciples, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."*

John 15:9-17 (Gospel reading for Sunday, May 21, 2006)

Dear Ones,

Isn't this a beautiful love letter? Have you ever thought of the Gospel in that sort of way? I have lately, a lot, as I hungrily read my Bible and as I experience the abundant love that this parish pours on me and my family every single day. I've struggled in this season with questions of love. How do I love God and others now that the one I loved most is no longer physically at my side? Sooner or later we all must face this hard question for it is the way of life on this earth. All that is seen passes away. Indeed, I do have new eyes that are focused intently on the Risen Christ -still with the wounds of his crucifixion yet eternally radiant in God's glory. My persistent question these days though is how do I keep loving others as deeply as I once did now that I know how devastating it is to say goodbye and very slowly move on? Rick is on the other side with our Savior, but I'm still here and that changes how I see everything in my life. In a way, I died too only my new life is still on this side of heaven. Slowly the answers are being revealed by God's grace and in the fullness of time, but I've needed this time of quiet, private prayers to first form the soul-searching questions. I do know that I can say with gratitude that you all save lives with your love. I and mine surely do LOVE you back!

Our Sunday Gospel reading on May 14 carries this same Spirit when Jesus tells his disciples "... *on that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.*" -(John 14:15-21)

Love is a word that we use with over-abundance. Rarely do those four letters L+O+V+E adequately express the depths of what we mean when we say to someone, or to God, "I love you." In one of my study bibles, the editor makes a comment that the two most difficult things to get straight in life are love and God. More often than not, the mess people make of their lives can be traced to failure or stupidity or meanness in one or both of those areas. We are all intricately related by the love of God through Jesus Christ. God and Love cannot be separated. God's Love, the Holy Spirit, is the living and always moving life between God and Jesus Christ, and between Christ and the Church. It's that living, moving love within the Trinity that pulls us in and binds us to God and each other for all eternity. This one true Love endures when all that we see slowly changes and disappears.

Still, our loves can be illusive, so hard to grasp. Love for a parent is different than love for a neighbor. We love our children and yet they can also make or break our hearts. We think we've found true love and it turns out to be an empty lust. The intimate love with a lover in a committed relationship is a bond that goes beyond words, but it too is fleeting. Too often we stumble when we chase after our own ideas of what love is, or when we think we're acting in the name of love. Think of all that we are tempted to say and do in the name of God. Yikes! We are only too human.

In the second lesson on 5 Easter Year B in 1 John 3: (14-17)18-24, we hear that "*we know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another.*" This is our life's purpose, not an easy one, "*...that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.*"

Jesus said it. Loving God and one another as well as ourselves covers all of the commandments. I was delighted to discover in the Daily Office a few weeks ago that the Ten Commandments were listed (3 Easter, Thurs.). As I read through them I thought (pardon my paraphrase), "Yup, if I *honor* my parents, *love* our One True God, honor the Sabbath and commitments, *love* my neighbors (but not their stuff), and indeed *love life* itself I will obey God's commandments. Jesus keeps it simple. He completes to its essence what all of the Old Testament tradition points to-- God is Love. That is radical Good News that lives on forever through our Risen Christ and each of us. **Alleluia!**