

Trinity 2

I take as my text today, from the First Epistle General of St. John:

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be alway acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

When reading the Gospel and Epistles of St. John and striving to understand the message, there is an aspect of this wonderful Apostle that we quickly recognize — he was a mystic.

But, at the same time, John had a practical mind and an ability to clearly define Christian concepts, in particular the concept of righteousness. Yet, his foremost concern was that of the love poured forth from God through his Son Jesus Christ.

We are reminded by John that Christ has taken us beyond the futility of the Law. In Christ, the Law was fulfilled, and, for St. John, that meant that the Law was made complete with the ***Law of Love***, thus making it possible for us to attain to righteousness despite our fallen nature, the innate weakness of the flesh. The hypocrisy of judgment under a Law corrupted by men had been overturned in Christ.

The passage today from St. John's First Epistle was most likely from a letter written to be circulated among the churches in the area surrounding Ephesus, churches that were considered to be under John's jurisdiction.

When we read the writings of John, it becomes clear that his idea of God was based on two aspects: God is light and God is love.

A perfect example of St. John's idea of God as light comes from the first chapter of his Gospel beginning at the first verse:

IN the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

This particular Gospel passage, plus several other verses that follow it, is most often used as the Last Gospel on festive occasions, and especially during a High or Solemn High Mass.

Also, the idea of God as Love runs throughout the writings of St. John, as we hear in this quote of Jesus in the 15th chapter of his Gospel beginning at the 12th verse:

THIS is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

And the most familiar, perhaps, of all verses from the 3rd chapter of John's Gospel:

So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting light.

God is **Light** and God is **Love**.

There is perhaps no one more tied to these aspects of God's Nature than John.

We find also through reports about John, that he was so focused on God's Love, focused to the extent that when he was too feeble to walk on his own and had to be carried about on a sort of stretcher, as he passed people, he would exhort them saying *Little children, love one another*.

To me, such a scene of John being carried about through the streets and blessing everyone he passed with those very words is all too vivid.

There is no greater focus on God's Love than in John's Gospel and Epistles, and therein is equally no greater focus on God as the Light in Whom there is no darkness.

That God is love is evidenced by the sending of his Son, Jesus, to be a propitiation for our sins and to be a reflection of the ever-seeking and ever-forgiving heart of God.

For John, the test of our commitment as Christians, the defining character, is love. It is his very definition of righteousness: *to be righteous is to love our neighbors.*

To attain to this righteousness, we must put our love into action. To say we love our neighbor is not enough; we must act on it.

Moreover, this action must come at some expense, some self-sacrifice, else we lose sight of the sacrificial love of Jesus made on the Cross.

If all that we do in the Name of our Lord is without some cost, without self-sacrifice, then how can we compare that action to the sacrifice of the Cross?

To talk of love toward one's neighbor without action does not set one apart in the world as a Christian; and so it follows with self-sacrifice.

How easy it is to perform a kindly deed from an abundance where the cost is not felt whether material or otherwise.

More to the point, it is the willingness to surrender something of value in our own lives to enrich the life of another that sets the action apart. Think how much our own lives are enriched by others.

So much of our concept of religion and worship is focused on externals. John refocuses us on the internal where the real test of our Christian life flows from the love for others that wells up within our hearts; where that Christ-like love is reflected in our lives and shines in our eyes; when, finally, we come to the full realization that faith and action are two sides of our spiritual coin.

Faith is superficial if it does not result in action.

Action has no moral authority without faith.

Thus, we could conclude from St. John that we cannot fully embrace the Christian life without first accepting Jesus Christ and his selfless, sacrificial, forgiving love, and then showing forth that love in our attitude towards others.

In a time when discord, even hatred, is sown in the name of religion; not only in the name of religion but also cloaked in Christianity; we will do well to remember that the ministry of Christ is the ministering of love: the teaching, preaching, and practicing of the sacrificial love of Christ.

We are left then with the inseparable commands:

First, to **believe in the Name of Jesus**, that is, the whole nature and character of Jesus so far as it is known to us; that he is the Son of God through Whom God is perfectly revealed to us and Who is the Saviour of our souls.

Second, to **love one another in a Christ-like manner**, a reflection of the selfless, self-sacrificing, forgiving love with which Jesus loves us.

It is the combination of the two — **right belief** and **right conduct** — upon which the Christian Life depends. We can not have one without the other.

We may say that **right belief** is our Christian **Theology** and we may define **right conduct** as our **Christian Ethic**— however defined, they are inseparable.

Believe. Believe in the **Name of Jesus Christ**. Believe in the completeness of his **Divine Nature**. That he is God, and though he took our human nature upon him, he remains a constituent, inseparable part of a **Divine Mystery** that is beyond our human comprehension.

But this belief is not a true belief unless it is translated into action. And that action is to love, even as simply as St. John himself said so many times: *Little children, love one another.*

It is what God is; it is what Jesus Christ did; and it is what the Holy Spirit inspires us to do.

Only when we accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, very God of very God, and act upon the love that is poured out for us; it is only then that we can we truly live the Christian life for which we were created.