

Trinity 2, 2019
Love is Hard
1 Corinthians 13
St. Andrew's – Jacksonville, OR
By Fr. Bill Baker

I was very pleased when I saw today's options for our readings. The love chapter from 1 Corinthians seemed very pertinent with the pangs I have been going through as I've been watching my dad battling for his life. But as I began to reflect on these passages something within me felt a discomfort not only from the heartache I felt as I watched my dad grappling with life, but the reminder of losing our daughter now 11 years past. Love is hard...

Today's New Testament reading is undoubtedly the most known in all of scripture. It is read at weddings, holds important messages to our refrigerators as magnets and is seen on the bumpers of both good and bad drivers. 1 Corinthians 13 is one of those Bible chapters that even the non-Christian will hold up as truth.

But love can be hard...love, with all its warmth, with all its pleasure, with all its satisfying feelings of completeness and fulfillment can also be one of the most difficult emotions for us to deal with. Some people even go so far as to try and avoid relationships to live lives of solitude to avoid the potential heartaches of love lost, be it from death or separation.

What is it about LOVE that makes it the most sought after desire in all creation while at the same time scares us more than any other emotion available to us? Maybe we do it wrong. Maybe we do it wrong and that is why St. Paul wrote about it so eloquently that we might perceive the truth that upholds the true and perfect love of God enabling us to love more perfectly ourselves.

Paul begins by telling us what love does not consist of: *"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove*

mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Paul is telling us that all is self-indulgent if it is not done in love. The very words we speak, when not from a heart filled with the love of God, grate upon the heavens themselves. Prophetic insights, knowledge and understanding can have their roots in demonic influences if the love of God is not there to cast them out. Even our human faith is susceptible to falsehood until the Holy Spirit comes upon us to expand the divine gifts granted to us. And even the most extreme sacrifices are worthless if they are presented without the love of God.

Worldly love without the divine essence of the Holy Spirit within us is an imitation that ends on the secular stage. The love we seek, the love that matters, comes solely from God himself. In 1 John 4:8 the truth of this is made clear; *"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."* And we know we have this divine love when we can rejoice, come what may, because we have faith in the ultimate will of God. Faith overcomes our fear of loss because we are enabled to find strength in a creator who loves us and will never leave us.

David cried and fasted while his son was yet alive. He prayed fervently day and night hoping for a miracle hoping for a future with the very bone of his bones...flesh of his flesh. But life would not be the course his son would take. Love is hard. But David's faith was grounded in Godly love and accepting God's will, David stood up, brushed himself off and ate. Love will pave the path and love will win the day.

After telling us what does not constitute divine love, Paul expresses the beauty and divine nature of a Godly love that occupies the hearts and minds of his children, *"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."* Love is not inclined to self but to others. We can only experience love by giving it away or accepting that which is freely offered. Love is the gift that brings ultimate joy and satisfies all hope, but only when it is not distorted. David knew this truth and was accounted a man after God's own heart.

If love is so good...why is it able to bring so much pain? True divine and eternal love is unfathomable. As there are no two snowflakes which are alike so to is every dimension of love distinct. Each relationship or encounter has a depth and meaning specific to itself. It is the depth of that relationship that dictates the pain when the connection is broken. The pain I experienced when my friend died in a motorcycle wreck or when my daughter died of complications or simply watching my dad suffering as his body gives way to age are all the pains of love distorted by the result of sin. The pain is real but the experience is different. Love is good and we should not shy away from it out of fear. The Love of God is unfathomable! It is not linear but all encompassing. Every possession of love is unique unto itself.

Love is the source of all! It is the wellspring from which everything draws life. Anything that does not find its source in the ultimate and eternal love of God will be exposed as chaff to be consumed. In the end all that will exist will stem from love and love alone, for God is love and nothing will exist outside his love.

“Love never ends, Paul continues, as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.” And here is where we can find comfort in the pain of lost love, for we shall become more than we are now. All that ails us will one day end and that which will prevail will be the perfect love of God found within each of us...Christ our head and we the body, the perfect sacrament of marriage of Christ and his Church. An eternal union fought for and won on the cross.

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers, John tells us in his first Epistle. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:16-18). And here is the whole point. Love is hard because it does not exist in lip service but in action. Every encounter with our brothers and sisters in this world, whether they be family, friends or strangers has a unique imprint upon our hearts. How we respond locks this imprint as a choice made upon our journeys. And so, I pray for you all that any pain you experience in

this world will be conquered by the love of God Almighty. Remember faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.

And I will leave the final word to St. Cyprian:

“Love is the foundation of peace, the steadfastness and firmness of unity. It is greater than both hope and faith. It excels both good works and suffering of the faith. As an eternal virtue, it will abide with us forever in the kingdom of heaven.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.