

10.25.2020 Trinity 20 (John 13:31-35)

Different groups of people are known, and distinguished from others, by different qualities. For example, a United States Marine is known by their uniform, a Shriner is easily identified by the hat they wear or those little cars they drive in parades, and if you're walking out of the grocery store and see a group of girls selling Do-si-dos, Tagalongs, or Thin Mints, you know that you're looking at a troop of Girl Scouts. Group leaders often come up with ways that make it easy for us to recognize their members, but 2,000 years ago our Leader, our Lord and our Savior, didn't design a uniform, a hat, or a product for His followers to sell. Instead, Jesus said, *"By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:35). If we want to be known as authentic Christians, then we must be known, and even set apart from the rest of the world, by that which set Jesus apart from the rest of the world: His self-sacrificing Love for others.

In the passage we read this morning, Jesus said, *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another"* (John 13:34). Jesus calls this a new commandment, yet one of the two great commandments that fulfilled the Old Testament Law and Prophets was to *"love your neighbor as yourself"* (Leviticus 19:18). God gave this commandment to the Israelites some 1,400 years before Christ walked this earth, but Jesus refers to it as a new commandment, and no one objects. Clearly, His first disciples understood that to *"love one another: just as I have loved you,"* was altogether different than anything God had commanded in the past.

Think for a moment about the images that must have filled the minds of His disciples when Jesus gave them this new commandment. The memories they recalled wouldn't be the many miraculous ways He reached out in love and made the blind see, the lame walk, cleansed lepers, or raised the dead, because the words of this commandment were more specific, and even more personal: *"Love one another: just as I have loved you."* Not, as I have loved this nation, or the world, but as I have loved you - personally and individually. His words would've caused every disciple to recall a different image. For Nathaniel, perhaps it was the way Jesus so lovingly praised him by saying, *"Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit"* (John

1:47). For Peter, the memory may have been the night he unsuccessfully tried to step out of a boat to meet his Lord on the raging sea, a night when Jesus, in love, took Peter by the hand and encouraged him to grow in faith (Matthew 14:22-33). For Matthew, it may have been the merciful, unconditional love Jesus expressed when He called a sinful, despised tax collector to be one of His first disciples (Matthew 9:9-13).

Every one of these men would've had their own personal memories of how Jesus loved them in life, because they weren't just witnesses to how He loved others, they were the direct objects of His love. They were all His beloved disciples, as are we, and when we view the commandment to *love one another: just as I have loved you* through the lens of the life and death of God's only Son, we see a very clear definition of how we, as His disciples, are to love one another.

If our desire is to obediently follow His perfect example, then it appears the first step in that endeavor is to make our brothers and sisters in Christ the direct objects of our love. It's certainly a good thing to love your church family, but if you want to love, just as God has loved you, then you'll have to go a step further, because to love, like Jesus loves, is to love personally and individually. In the beginning, God did not make an entire race of people to cover the face of the earth. He made one man and one woman (Genesis 1:27), who He loved personally and individually, and the Bible records the way God, from that day forward, has manifested His Divine love in the lives of individual people. People like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah; St. Peter, who Jesus named the Rock (Matthew 16:18); James and John, who he called the Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17). God, in love, even chose to work through an individual person, the Blessed Virgin Mary, to bring His only-begotten Son into the world.

In the beginning, God, who is love, created individuals. Throughout the course of history, God has lovingly worked through individuals. God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, clearly and completely expressed His Divine, sacrificial love for individuals on the Cross at Calvary, and if we want to love just as He has loved us, then we must love individuals, and sacrifice our lives out of love for them. This is the clear message of Holy Scripture, a message summarized in 1 John 3:16 (NIV), which states: *"This is how we know what*

*love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”*

Different groups of people are known, and distinguished from others, by different qualities. Group leaders often come up with ways that make it easy for us to recognize their members, and our Leader, our Lord and our Savior, showed us the way that we will be known when He laid down His life for us. If we want to be known as authentic Christians, then we must be known, and even set apart from the rest of the world, by that which set Jesus apart from the rest of the world: His self-sacrificing Love for each and every child of God.

*“By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”*