



Contributed by Father Paul Voisin, C.R.

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SEVENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
February 20, 2022

GATHERING TIME
(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

Many years ago, an American writer, E. Stanley Jones, wrote about a New York hospital that was losing a high percentage of children ages one year and under. It was a 'state of the art' hospital in relation to technology and the professional health care staff. Finally, someone suggested that one important ingredient in patient care was missing – love. The Hospital began a program of 'love volunteers' of women who came in various hours of the day to provide loving attention to the children, especially through touch and holding. The results were overwhelming, and after four months the Chief of Staff said that "We could no more do without these love volunteers than we could without medicine". Such is the power of love!*

In our own lives we have the experience of being loved, and loving. Being 'in love' is a great feeling. Love, however, must go beyond just being a feeling, something that can come and go, and calls for a commitment, and is reflected not only by sweet words and nice cards and gifts, but expresses itself in sacrifices in favour of the other.

Divine love is also within our experience, the fruit of our prayer and reflection, our reading of God's Word, our participation in the Sacraments, and our sharing in the life of the community. Divine love, and 'pure' and 'unconditional' (human) love, transforms us, and raises us up.

Warm-up Activity *(about 8-10 minutes):*

Just as love brings life, unfortunately, in our human condition, love can always come to an end. One can 'fall out of love'. People we love, and who love us, pass away. The loss of love wounds and weakens us.

- a) What was your experience of ‘falling in love’?
- b) What was your experience of ‘falling out of love’?
- c) How would we describe our ‘falling in love’ with Jesus?

The Table of the Word

Although the words of Jesus are clear and strong, we may squirm at committing ourselves to love as He loves us. In our human condition, we can easily identify ‘enemies’ that we would find difficult to forgive. According to our criteria, they have been judged and condemned! Jesus leaves no doubt that this is not reflective of his presence and love in our lives, or that we are called to be and do better. His grace, and the power of his love – like that of the ‘love volunteers’ in my story – can make all the difference in the world. Perhaps we can think of someone we have failed to love enough. It may have been from a bad first impression, or some evil that we perceive they have done to harm us (or someone we love). But, at the same time, we may have seen, once we got to know them, that our first impression was wrong, that we had ‘prejudged’ them. We may have wasted a lot of time in energy between that first impression and coming to know, understand and love them. That was, in a real way, the power of love – the love of God – entering into that friendship. Or perhaps we have fallen out of love with someone because of something they have said or done, or that we perceived that they said or did. We may automatically decide on their motivation, on their will-fulness, and on the damage they inflicted. Once again, sometimes with time we discover things are not as they appear, and can even have compassion for them, due to the circumstances that come to our attention. We have also experienced, perhaps, in our own lives this real situation, and the pain that it caused ‘in the meantime’, until the situation was resolved and there was reconciliation. With gratitude we recognize the power of the love of God active in these situations. For God to act, though, we need humility (not pride), understanding (not judgment), and the willingness to forgive (not condemn). We have all felt the relief and new life that comes from being forgiven, and experiencing reconciliation, but we know that it is not always easy to give. Once again, the words of Jesus echo, “Do to others as you would have them do to you”. We all seek love, understanding, peace, respect, and unity with others, yet they are so difficult to achieve if we are not turning to God in our ‘worse’ moments, so that it may become a moment of grace, healing and new life.

Penitential Rite:

God IS love. It is His nature, and is ours to the extent that we share in His life. Yet, we are not always loveable, or loving. Those moments separate us from God, the source of love.

Lord Jesus, you have created us out of love,

Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you have created us to love, as we are loved by you, **Christ, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, your love heals and saves,

Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray:

(by St. Francis de Sales)

“O love eternal, my soul needs and chooses you eternally!
Ah, come Holy Spirit, and inflame our hearts with your love!
To love -- or to die! To die -- and to love!
To die to all other love in order to live in Jesus' love,
so that we may not die eternally.
But that we may live in your eternal love,
O Saviour of our souls,
we eternally sing, "Live, Jesus! Jesus, I love! Live, Jesus, whom I love!
Jesus, I love, Jesus who lives and reigns forever and ever."
Amen.”

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering word, and that God is present in the word proclaimed. This is the word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the small Christian community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

FIRST READING 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

In those days, Saul went down to the desert of Ziph with three thousand picked men of Israel, to search for David in the desert of Ziph. So, David and Abishai went among Saul's soldiers by night and found Saul lying asleep within the barricade, with his spear thrust into the ground at his head and Abner and his men sleeping around him. Abishai whispered to David: "God has delivered your enemy into your grasp this day. Let me nail him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I will not need a second thrust!" But David said to Abishai, "Do not harm him, for who can lay hands on the Lord's anointed and remain unpunished?" So David took the spear and the water jug from their place at Saul's head, and they got away without anyone's seeing or knowing or awakening. All remained asleep, because the Lord had put them into a deep slumber. Going across to an opposite slope, David stood on a remote hilltop at a great distance from Abner, son of Ner, and the troops. He said: "Here is the king's spear. Let an attendant come over to get it. The Lord will reward each man for his justice and faithfulness. Today, though the Lord delivered you into my grasp, I would not harm the Lord's anointed."

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

Brothers and sisters: It is written, The first man, Adam, became a living being, the last Adam a life-giving spirit. But the spiritual was not first; rather the natural and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, earthly; the second man, from heaven. As was

the earthly one, so also are the earthly, and as is the heavenly one, so also are the heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

GOSPEL Luke 6:27-38

Jesus said to his disciples: “To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. “Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give, and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

COMMENTARY:

In our First Reading we see, dramatically, the power of love revealed. David is being pursued by Saul. Saul wants to do away with this man, chosen by God, to replace him. Yet, David has every reason and opportunity to kill Saul, but does not do it. He recognizes Saul as “the Lord’s anointed”, and will not kill him. David understood the ways of God, which Saul had forgotten, and showed mercy to his enemy.

St. Paul reminds us in the Second Reading, that we are children of God, and have received the Spirit. We are not only ‘dust’, but spirit. Sharing in His life is the source of our journey to holiness, and gives us hope that God can continue to do the impossible and the improbable if we are open to His grace. In our human condition I can imagine we have all seen some calls to love someone as impossible and improbable, yet our experience can tell us that God’s love can reach beyond the ‘dust’ and help us to love as we are loved by God. In the gospel of this weekend, Jesus speaks dramatically about the need for love. This is a sign of His presence, as His ministry was motivated by love. His ‘golden rule’ of “Do to others as you would have them do to you”, however, is only the beginning. As He says,

even the public sinners (tax collectors, etc.) love those who love them. In order to truly be children of the Most High our love must exceed that love of those who are attractive, have something to offer us in a relationship, or love us in return. He says we must “love our enemies” At this we may be tempted, in our human condition, to ‘check out’ and say that Jesus doesn’t know what He is talking about. We cannot go through life without difficulties in relationships, whether at home, at school, at work, or among friends. We accept it as ‘natural’ that we will fall out with someone, that there will be discord and upset, that friendship and love will be abandoned. Sad, but true! Jesus further challenges us against judging and condemning others, also temptations in our human condition. Once again His words are powerful when He tells us that we are to forgive,” to be forgiven”. No one, including Jesus, ever told us it would be easy to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is a struggle, a constant challenge, but God’s grace is with us as we try to love as we are loved by God.

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. “I would not harm the Lord’s anointed” 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

Loving someone also means protecting them. Ask any parent! Being loved gives one a feeling of being protected, of being safe. Just as David protected Saul, who had been anointed by God (even though he was trying to hunt David down and kill him), God protects us who He has anointed in our Baptism and Confirmation with Holy Chrism – setting us apart and consecrating us to Him alone.

- a) How have I experienced God’s protection?
- b) How has God intervened in my life, changing my plans and ‘destiny’?

2. “we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one” 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

Jesus, God-made-man, possessed divine and human nature. In our Baptism we enter into the life of God, and He enters into our life in a profound way. Our union with God the Father, and our growing and maturing in Christ, with the grace of the Holy Spirit allows us to share in His divine life, so that “we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one”.

- a) What does it mean to me to “bear the image of the heavenly one”?
- b) How has this influenced my ability to love?

3. “love your enemies and do good to them” Luke 6:27-38

I can imagine that some of the disciples, in hearing these words, thought (or said), “Now you’ve done it!” I can imagine for some of them, and for some of us, it is just too much to ask – to love our enemies.

- a) Have I tried, and been ‘successful’ in showing love to an enemy?
- b) How did I feel? How did the other person react and feel?
- c) How do I do to others as I would have them to do unto me?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. **Word of the Week:** “Do to others as you would have them do to you”

2. **Suggestions for the Week:** This may be for some an easy Word of the Week, and for others a difficult one. Each one of us must search our own mind and heart to discover this challenge that Jesus gives us. Perhaps, in a special way this week, you can be more aware of the power and influence of your words and actions, and use the ‘measuring stick’ of true and unconditional love to judge whether your words and actions treated someone as you would want to be treated, as you would want to be spoken to, as you would want to be considered by others. Sometimes, in our human condition, we fail to recognize the joy or the pain that our words and actions bring to others. Naturally, Jesus wants those sources of joy to increase, and the sources of pain to decrease and disappear. We can do this, with the grace of God.

3. **Intercessions:**

In our efforts to mirror the love of God to others, we are well aware of our need for the grace of God, a grace with which he abundantly blesses us. All of us have prayed for greater love and understanding – in our family, at work and at school, and among our friends. In our human condition, we have all struggled with failing to love. Through the grace of God, we have overcome many of the obstacles to love, as God loves, and are giving a testimony of love to others, a love that can transform them the way His love has transformed us.

Lord God, renew us in your love so that we may love as we are loved by you.

We pray... **Share your love with us, Lord**

Lord God, thank you for loving me, even when I felt unworthy and not deserving of your love or mercy. We pray... **Share your love with us, Lord**

Lord God, we ask forgiveness for the times we have not valued, we have not protected, and we have not loved. We pray... **Share your love with us, Lord**

Lord God, forgive us for the times we had judged and condemned others, and withheld your love from them. We pray... **Share your love with us, Lord**

Let us pray:

Almighty God, you are the source of all that we have and are.

You are the source of unconditional love, the love that heals and saves, and raises us up.

We turn to you in need of that love that will inspire and empower us
to love as we are loved, as you have loved us.

May our love, as imperfect as it may be at times, be a sign to others of YOUR divine love,
reaching out to them to love as they are loved by you.

Through your Son, school us as His disciples to renew the face of the earth,
through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*This introductory story is taken from Illustrated Sunday Homilies, Year C, Series II, by Mark Link, S.J. Tabor Publishing, Allen Texas. Page 67.

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one, OUR FATHER...

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: **website:** www.resurrectionists.ca. **Email:** provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).