

The Church of Saint Pascal Baylon

Fr. Mike Byron, Pastor: Sunday Homily

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Saturday morning I gathered for breakfast, as I do every couple of months, with a group of buddies with whom I went to college. If everybody shows up there are about a dozen of us, and we've been getting together like this for several years. About a month ago, one of the group died after a short struggle with cancer. It was a shock to all of us. So there was some grieving going on around the table, amid all the other banter. But it wasn't all sadness. Our friend left behind two adult sons, both in their late twenties by now, and for the first time they joined us at the meal that their Dad used to come to. They were warmly welcomed by this group of old guys, and brought into the circle of fellowship. It was the only right thing to do.

The way to honor someone who has been loved and is now gone is to love the people that he loved—in this case, his children. They will not be left all alone; we will see to that. It's not because we are all the same age, or have the same life experiences or dispositions. This breakfast group is a bunch of St. John's graduates and one of the sons is a Tommie. Imagine that! It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Not when we are around the table.

And that really cuts to the heart of today's Sacred Scripture and Jesus' teaching about love. When it comes to the responsibilities, the joys and the challenges of being "friends" of the Lord, to honor him is demanding that we love the people that he loved. Period. It sounds pretty simple and easy on the face of it, but the hard part comes when we recall that to love as Jesus did means to love *everybody*—*everybody*—because that's what he did. And the honest truth is that I don't *want* to love everybody, and neither do you.

I want to love the people whom I enjoy being with. The people with whom I have a lot in common, whether in culture, age, politics, religion/theology, or temperament. I want to love the people who don't annoy me or inconvenience me or offend me by their behavior. I want to love the ones who agree with me about all things, who are attractive and engaging and interesting and who seem to be well put-together.

But that's not the commandment that we just heard proclaimed in today's gospel of John. Jesus did not say, "Love one another." He said, "Love one another **as I have loved you.**" That means everybody, all the time. None of the rest matters.

It was Jesus who loved the person of the wrong race (Samaritan). The wrong religion (pagan), the wrong lifestyle (prostitute), the wrong politics (Roman Soldiers), the wrong morals (thief on the cross), and the wrong profession (tax collectors). And maybe the hardest of all, he loved the people of his own religion who didn't see the things of God the way He did—the pharisees, the scribes, the sadducees, the high priests. Isn't that still the most aggravating person for us to love today?...the "Catholic" who isn't the good-enough Catholic as we see it? Or the "Wrong" Catholic? This gospel is telling us that it doesn't matter. *Especially* when we gather around the table, it doesn't matter.

Today's first reading (Acts) gives us a vivid example of how the early church wrestled with exactly the same kind of challenge—to love as expansively as Jesus did. It wasn't easy then, either.

Cornelius was a Roman soldier, who was a God-fearing man but not a Jew and certainly not a Christian. It was to him that Peter was sent—not because Peter had any love for Cornelius, but because *Jesus* did. And the only way to honor Jesus is to love the people whom he loved—all of them. To do less is to serve a false god. And so Peter comes to his amazing revelation in saying:

“In truth, I see that God shows no partiality (None!). Rather, in every nation (Every!) whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.”

That news is *wonderful* for the honest sinner in us. And at the same time, it's *awful* for the bigoted, narrow-minded religious snob in us. We must love even those whom we don't like. We have to love the people whom Jesus loves—*all* of them. Nothing else matters.

Are we ready for that? This is the question that the Sacred Scriptures lay before us today. Are we ready to love—truly to love—all those “others” whom God has chosen to love without asking our permission or approval first? If so, welcome to the Easter table of friendship—with all of its rewards and demands.

If a bunch of aging Johnnies can break bread with Tommies—out of respect for one whom they both love—then pretty much anything is possible.