

NOT A SUGGESTION

There's a story, probably fictional, that as an old man, St. John the Apostle would be brought into a gathering of the faithful to preach. He would sit. People would gather around him and he would say, *Little children, let us love one another*, and that was the end of his homily. And then at the next gathering he would say the same thing, *Little children, let us love one another*. On the one hand, that seems like some easy homily preparation. On the other hand, maybe he said that over and over because it was what people needed to hear.

Three points from today's gospel.

Point 1: Where do you live? I don't mean your address, neighborhood or subdivision. Where do you dwell? Jesus says, *Remain in my love* which is a variation of what we heard Jesus say last week when he said, *I am in the vine and you are the branches*. In other words, it's not just following Jesus' teaching, which of course is important. It means being organically connected to Christ in a real, living way.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton said that the interior life is the continuation of Christ living in us. For a Christian, Jesus' love is to be our dwelling place. That love tells us who we are as beloved, adopted, children of God. That love comforts us when we are down and challenges us when we become complacent. That love calls us to become the best version of ourselves, which is a contemporary way of saying it calls us to be saints. Christians are called to live in God's love and grow in God's love. In that love, we are loved and we learn to love.

Point 2: *Love one another as I love you*. That might sound like a quaint, warm fuzzy saying. It's not. It's a lifelong challenge. To say I love is to say I am willing to suffer for you. To truly love one another is hard enough, but Jesus doesn't leave it there. Here we find one of the most pesky, irritating words in the Bible and in the English language: *as*

Elsewhere Jesus tells us to love our neighbor *as* ourselves; to pray asking God to forgive us our trespasses *as* we forgive those who trespass against us; St. Paul tells husbands to love their wives *as* Christ loves the Church. And today, Jesus tells us to love one another *as* he loves us. His love is total, complete and even unto death, death on a cross. As his disciples we're to love *as* he loves us. We're not just to live in his love, not just to grow in his love but we're to love *as* he loves.

Point 3: *This is my commandment.* To love as Jesus loves isn't a recommendation. It's not a suggestion. It's a commandment and one that we ignore to our own detriment. For Christians to love one another isn't an option but a commandment and a useful tool for examining our conscience. How have I or haven't I loved as Jesus loves? In the second reading St. John tells us that God *is* love. He doesn't say God is loving but that God is love and that means, to love, to really and truly love, as God loves, is to become more godlike, it's to grow in holiness.

Here in the Eucharist, we remain in the love of Jesus which is one reason why the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is so important. Here we enter into the hour of Jesus' death and resurrection. Here Jesus continues to give himself to us under the form of bread and wine, which is another way of saying that here he continues to love us. Here in the Eucharist we remain in his love, we grow in his love and we learn to love as he loves.

Remain in my love, love one another as I love you and this is my commandment. Let us love one another. With lives of intentional faith may we remain and dwell in God's love. May we be faithful to his commandment. And may we go forth to serve as Jesus serves, give as Jesus gives and to love *as* Jesus loves.