

**5<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR C HOMILY 2022**  
**ALL YoU NEED TO DO IS LOVE!**  
*Jn 13.31-35                      AA 14.21-27                      Apoc 21.1-5*

*“Google it, mate”* has been one of the election slogans that has popped up during the current campaign, and it’s sometimes the best advice you can take, as none of us has the answers to everything, and learning and change are lifelong processes, reminding us of the need for open and questioning minds, as I like to tell myself.

Anyway, I took this advice in relation to today’s theme of love one another, as one of Jesus’ final instructions. Interestingly, what I discovered was that *“Love Thy Neighbour”* was the title of 7 international films from 1940, of 5 TV series since 1972, a few books, and of course, any number of popular songs along the way, from 1934. So it’s a popular enough theme, but what does it really mean in practice?

Nor can I help myself once again mentioning the 1967 song of the year by The Beatles, titled *“All You Need is Love”*, composed for Expo 67 in Montreal, simple but with resonating tune and lyrics (*although starting off with the Marseillaise was probably not the greatest idea, if the words are analysed!*). It was not written as a romantic love song, but more concerned our common humanity, and the need to work together in harmony and peace to build a better world. Its intent was to bring people together, but that was a bit of a forlorn hope, beyond all the hype and excitement at the time. And here we are now, unfortunately in an increasingly conflicted world at present, yet still hoping for peace and good will to win out in the long run. And surely that’s at the heart of Jesus’ message that we hear again today.

The main problem when we survey the world scene, we might wonder whether any progress has been made in the ensuing 2,000+ years, since Jesus didn’t invent, but certainly amplified the commandment of love, even to include love of enemies, and his teaching on forgiveness as not just once up, but enduring. That’s the really hard part, when it comes to the crunch!

The appalling scenario of war and ensuing suffering in Ukraine, even condoned by the Russian Patriarch, reflects a sad picture of the dark side of human nature. The Gospel has somehow been totally distorted by some, into a nationalistic false history of fake truth, just to suit those who wish to believe it. Then, in other parts of the world, there is ongoing armed conflict and hostility between individuals, different ethnic groups, and then nations, with no good reason, apart from financial or territorial gain, and at least no justification for the lack of respect for human rights and dignity, let alone respect for human life. If love of neighbour was applied and lived in practice, the world would have to be a better place.

Now, on the theological level, as we go around and around in John’s Gospel, here we are again, back at Jesus’ seemingly unending farewell discourse, where John is concerned at tying up the loose ends of *endings and beginnings*, as was the title of a book I once read, I think!

Into the darkness disappears Judas, symbolic of the evil forces that had overtaken him at the time, despite all the time he had spent with Jesus during his public ministry. What possessed him to bail out at this point, we might ask? Once again, we are presented with an illustration of human weakness, as the 30 pieces of silver seemed like a good idea at the time, but all to no avail. And the human weakness doesn’t end there, as they go to sleep in Gethsemane and then Peter caps it off with his three times denial, countered in last week’s Gospel, with Jesus as Good Shepherd, commissioning him as leader after three times questioning a frustrated and confused Peter about his love for Jesus, after all they’d been through.

We return, after the call to service with the foot-washing episode, and Peter’s initial rejection of it, in all humility, expressing his unworthiness as a sinner, Jesus lines up his inner circle to be prepared to face the challenges of the future, as life is to go on without him, at least in terms of his ongoing physical presence with them.

And, in the end, the simple summation of his message is the call to love one another, nothing particularly new as an instruction, as it was there in the Old Testament as well, with the injunction to love God in general, and to love one’s neighbour as oneself, expressed in Leviticus. It is called the ethic of reciprocity or the Golden Rule, or Great Commandment, and, as we know, is at the heart of most of the many and diverse religions of the world, a sort of common ground all around, including in the humanitarian ethos. And no-one can really say that’s a bad thing, can they?

The scripture commentators suggest that Jesus' love command extends the earlier meaning to reflect his own self-sacrificing love for others, culminating in his death on the Cross, but not ending there, from a faith perspective, where we believe in his enduring presence, following his Resurrection, as we celebrate Easter season.

As a theological summary, Brendan Byrne SJ comments thus: ***“In this Fourth Gospel (of John), we have in the community’s understanding of itself the full sweep... of incarnation: the love which the members experience from one another, which itself is an extension of the love they have received from Jesus, which is itself an extension of the divine love, reaching out to share eternal life with the world.”***

Jesus' final command is the foundation for the way believers should behave towards each other and beyond their own communities of family and friends, as well. This 'new' commandment is not grounded in *“extensive exhortations to moral virtue or obedience to the law”* (Jerome Biblical Commentary), not that these things are important in themselves, but the priority is human persons, and love of God, neighbour and self. That was always my first emphasis when teaching Canon Law. The Gospel comes first, and all else follows, with the good of the people of God and a fair go for all, as fundamental principles.

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*15<sup>th</sup> May 2022*

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