

Hanging on the wall of my bedroom is a 72-year-old crucifix. It was a wedding gift to my parents. Traditionally, a crucifix hung on a wall in the bedroom where the husband and wife would see it upon waking in the morning and before going to bed at night. Its purpose was not to remind the couple that marriage is a cross, a burden, but of the selfless outpoured love of God given in Jesus, a love they vowed to live for each other and their family. Living and loving in this way, husband and wife truly are revealed as sacraments of the love of God spoken about in today’s liturgy.

Today’s gospel message seems pretty simple: love one another. The challenge is what Christ adds to that command: “as I love you.” It’s the “as I love you” part that’s tricky. How did Jesus love us? Unto death. Today’s second reading proclaims that God is defined by one word—*LOVE*—a self-less, poured out, giving love.

Loving one another is much more than simply a feel-good moment—the romantic love portrayed in songs, novels, movies and television shows. Talk to any parent of a newborn child who experiences sleepless nights and still goes to work the next day; 2 a.m. feedings with diaper changes; a colicky baby—they will tell you love, true love, is hard work! Or talk to one of the couples in our parish with whom we have celebrated 40, 50, 60 or more years of marriage commitment about “laying down their lives for each other” to preserve and grow in the commitment of love they gave each other on their wedding day and you will learn what “loving one another” as Christ loved us demands. In order to love one another we must each day, and often throughout a given day, choose to relinquish our own wants and needs; sacrifice our own comfort; die to our point of view and deeply held preconceptions.

This weekend and next we celebrate with children of our parish who receive their First Holy Communion. These celebrations are a good opportunity for all of us to reflect on what our own partaking of this sacrament is about. It is simultaneously a personal

experience of the love of Jesus for me, and also a public action through which I commit myself to living that same sacrificial outpoured love for all people. As I've mentioned previously, this is what our response of "Amen" we make before consuming the Eucharistic Body and Blood of Jesus is all about.

Every Sunday as we gather for Mass in addition to our public act of coming forward and receiving Holy Communion we have an opportunities in small, but real, ways to practice the command of love. St. Benedict in his Rule states: "Let all guests who come be received as Christ" (RB, 53). The practice of hospitality is a practical way that individually and as a parish we put love for God through love for others into practice. Taking time to introduce yourself to a fellow parishioner you may not know, or a guest who has come; sliding over in the pew to make room for someone rather than forcing them to crawl over you to find a place to sit; looking the person you give the Sign of Peace to in the eye and sincerely greeting them with, "The Peace of Christ be with you" rather than just a perfunctory handshake and mumbled greeting; inviting someone to sit at your table at coffee and donuts after Mass or yourself going to a table to sit and visit with someone, or a group of people you do not know; not big things to be sure, but actions requiring making the choice to go out of ourselves, our comfort zone, to see and love the Jesus in another person like the apostle Peter in Cornelius' house in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles are small, but real, steps assisting us in living the outpoured love of Jesus.

Finally, if you do not already have one, I strongly encourage every household to procure and display proudly a crucifix both as a symbol of John 3:16: God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" and the command of Jesus: "Do this in memory of me."

Fr Jim Secora