

In today's Gospel, we hear some very familiar words from Jesus at the Last Supper. We've probably heard them thousands of times: "Love one another." It sounds so simple. You would think that Jesus wouldn't have to leave us such an obvious commandment. It would just be part of our human nature, but we all know from own experiences that He does have to tell us. Unfortunately, we need to be reminded to love one another.

And He's real specific as to what type of love it's meant to be, "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." It's not just a love based on good feelings and being kind to others that He's talking about. It's even a more intense expression of love than "love your neighbor as yourself." It's a love that leads us to give of our entire selves to others.

That's how Jesus loved. He laid down His life for us on the cross. He loved by going beyond Himself, by loving others more than He loved Himself. After all, Jesus loved everyone – of course His followers, but also His accusers, His torturers, His executioners. He loved them all more than He loved Himself. We're infinitely loved by God. Jesus is the perfect example for us to follow. Therefore, we can be expected to love others more than ourselves.

In 1941, a Polish Catholic monk named Maximillian Kolbe was arrested for helping Jewish refugees during the Holocaust. He was sent by the Nazis to the Auschwitz concentration camp, where he was subjected to brutal treatment. While imprisoned, he showed great love for his fellow prisoners. To prevent them from going hungry, he often shared his rations with them, even though this meant going hungry himself. At night, instead of resting, he often went around asking if there was anything he could do for his fellow prisoners. But he performed his greatest act of selfless love following the apparent escape of a prisoner.

In response to the apparent escape, the deputy commander of Auschwitz had ten prisoners randomly selected to starve to death in a bunker, in hopes that this would deter future

escape attempts. When one of the prisoners heard that he had been selected to die, he cried out, “My wife! My children!” When Kolbe heard the other prisoner’s cries, he volunteered to take his place. The commander surprisingly accepted Kolbe’s request and had him placed in the bunker with the other prisoners that had been selected.

The prisoners soon experienced great hunger and thirst. But Kolbe never complained or requested anything. Instead, he tried to keep his fellow prisoners in good spirits by leading them in prayer and singing hymns to the Virgin Mary. After three brutal weeks, only Kolbe was still alive. In the end, Saint Maximilian Kolbe is said to have accepted his death calmly and peacefully.

That’s how Jesus loves us. He doesn’t hold anything back, not even His life. And that’s how we’re called to love each other. This self-giving love should be the calling card of a Christian. At least that’s what Jesus says, “This is how all will know that you are my disciples.”

Names and titles can trigger certain reactions. Some names become stereotypes. When we hear that someone is Irish or French, is a Republican or a Democrat, is a doctor or a lawyer, or from Texas or New York, certain feelings and expectations are evoked about what that person will be like. The title “Christian” is no different.

What comes to mind when you hear the title “Christian”? The reaction inside these walls can be a lot different from out there in our culture. Today’s reaction may be different from years ago. In some circles, the title “Christian” evokes negative impressions of intolerance, a politicized and power-hungry religion, and an absence of respect for non-Christians.

While Gandhi was a practicing Hindu, Christianity intrigued him. In his reading of the Gospels, Gandhi was impressed by Jesus. He wanted to know more about this Jesus that Christians referred to as “the Christ, the Messiah.” One Sunday morning, Gandhi decided that he

would visit one of the Christian churches in Calcutta. Upon seeking entrance to the church sanctuary, he was stopped at the door by the ushers. He was told he wasn't welcome, nor would he be permitted to attend this particular church as it was for high-caste Indians and whites only. He was neither high caste, nor was he white. Because of this rejection, Gandhi turned his back on Christianity.

Years later, when Gandhi was questioned as to why he rejected becoming a follower of Christ he stated, "Oh, I don't reject Christ. I love Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ. If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today." That's quite an indictment, but it contains a bit of truth. Sometimes, we're our own worst enemies.

But in other circles, the title "Christian" indicates someone on whom we can rely to tell the truth, someone who treats all people with respect, someone who is concerned with fairness in our world, someone who lives not by majority opinion but by God's law, someone who knows their destiny is not of this world. At our best, Christians are the model of living according to Gospel truth. We're the model of respect for all human life as well as a respect for sexuality, marriage, human dignity, and honesty. We're the model of a new kind of relationship among people based not on power but on respect. To everyone, the title "Christian" should mean someone who is truly trying to follow in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth.

It's easier said than done for sure. The world in which we live can be a great test of our faith. The world pushes us to stay in our comfort zones and love the people we like and the people far away with which we don't have to interact. But Jesus doesn't put any disclaimers on His commandment. He calls us to love the people we like and also the people we can't stand

being in the same room with, to love the people that shower us with affection and also the people that hurt us, to love the people that build us up and also the people that try to tear us down.

The love we have for one another should make us stand out like sore thumbs. If we're trying to love each other as Christ loves us, we're giving powerful witness to our world. As Christians, we have the power to bring others to Christ but we also have the power to drive them away from Christ. For people today, the strongest proof that Christ is truly risen is not found in any book or in any argument but in how those who claim to be Christians are living.

To love as Christ loves is impossible for any of us by ourselves. Jesus is the source of love. Our strength to love comes from the very presence of Christ within us and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Lord gives us nourishment for the task to love in the Eucharist at every Mass. We can love because we've first been loved.

Brothers and sisters, we're heirs to the new commandment. The commandment to love given by Jesus is a proactive attitude towards others. It's a love that doesn't nurse old wounds, old hurts, old gripes, and complaints. We've observed this attitude in others and, if we're honest, in ourselves at times. In no uncertain terms, we're commanded to go beyond ourselves, all the way to the cross, if necessary. By our efforts and through our actions of love, we keep the commandment to love alive and vital. We keep the sign of love ever visible to a world in desperate need of more love. Only love can dispel hate.

"As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." Does the world plainly see us as people of the new commandment? Can it be said of us what was said of the early Christian community, "See how much they love one another"? Is love our calling card?