

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 8-9, 2021, Cycle B

We are told by the Acts of the Apostles that Peter and the “circumcised believers who had accompanied him” were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles. In other words, Peter and his companions were shocked that those they considered not holy – non observers of Torah, would be able to receive the Holy Spirit. Their very notions of what constitutes holy were being shattered before their very eyes. Early Christians had to learn to redefine what being holy meant in the light of how Jesus lived his life, and what Jesus taught.

The First Letter of John presents us with that redefinition of holiness: “Beloved let us love one another, because love is of God.” First John goes so far as to say: “Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.” God is the definition of holiness; if one does not love, one is not holy, for love is the definition of holiness.

In the gospel passage of John, Jesus defines his divine love for us! Jesus says: “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” And God considers us his friends; in Jesus, God laid down His life for us, and we are to love as Jesus loves. We are to lay down our lives in service to each other. Loving as Jesus loves – sacrificing ourselves for the sake of others – is the sole criterion that determines our holiness. Being the broken, wounded, sinful human beings we are, we say impossible; hopeless! It would be easier to observe the Mosaic Laws of purity and circumcision! Really! Jesus tells us with the grace of God all things are possible.

Unfortunately, many of us do not know how to let the grace of God in. The world is filled with much hate, as we all know only too well. Not only are many people not living selflessly, but they are living with hatred and disregard for others. Even worse, many claim to be followers of Christ while spewing hatred toward others or toward certain groups of people. The love envisioned by the first Letter of John and the Gospel of John may be difficult, but it is essential that we, who are disciples of Jesus, open ourselves up to the grace of God and make every effort we can toward living a life that sacrifices for others. Besides Jesus, where can we find modern day examples of the love that Christ lived?

This Mother’s Day, I would say for most of us, we need to go no further than our own mothers to witness the possibility of loving as Jesus loves, and therefore being holy! Most of us can recall the countless hours and years of sacrifice our mothers poured out for us. Most of our mothers denied themselves consistently so that we might have life and life – beginning with the 9 months they carried us in their wombs – giving of their very bodies. The selfless love of Jesus impossible? Most of our mothers show us to love as Jesus loved is possible!