

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend, we hear St. Paul's famous hymn about love. We've all heard it before: "**Love is patient, love is kind...**" (I Corinthians 13:4). Probably 90% of the weddings I have done over the last 16 years have had this reading as part of the ceremony. It is a beautiful and powerful testament to love. Yet, nowhere in the reading does it specifically mention marriage. St. Paul is speaking about the love that *all Christians* are to have for each other. In fact, he is clear that without this love, all the other gifts are pointless. In the previous section, he was describing the beautiful gifts of the Holy Spirit manifested in the Church, but he says that even if we were to speaking "angelic tongues" (I Cor 13:1) but don't have love, we would just be a cymbal clashing... not having real meaning. If we had such incredible gifts of prophecy and understanding and knowledge, but don't have love, we are nothing. If we have even the gift of faith to say to this mountain, "Move" – and it does – but we don't have love, we are nothing. Even, even dare I say, if we were to be martyred, to give our bodies over, but if we did it without love, we gain nothing.

St. Paul recognizes that at the Heart of God is love, and without love, we are not one with God, we are not conformed to Him, we are not like Him at all. Love gives us the likeness to God. But what is love? The world has all sorts of understandings of what love is.

Too often in the culture, spurred on by the media, love is synonymous with sex. How many movies or shows indicate to us that a couple is "really in love" once they have had sex with each other? Think about the 1997 movie *Titanic*. This "great love story" is about a couple of people who barely know each other, and who sleep together, despite her "repressive fiancé." They know each other only a few days, yet, Hollywood holds this up as *true love*. But is this love at all? Yes, it is a rush of emotion, a "high," but had Titanic not sunk, had Jack lived to reach port, would they have been able to persevere in this "love" which was based on Rose running away from someone else?

St. Paul shows a different side of love.

Love is patient, love is kind.

It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude,

it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury,

it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (I Cor 13:4-7)

Nowhere does St. Paul say, "Love feels good." Love is this choice to *will the good of the other as other*. True, when you have great feelings, they help you to be patient and kind, but what about when the feelings leave... and they *always will*. There will always be seasons and times of being down, or self-absorbed, or just not feeling anything at all... and these are the times when *real love* comes out. As a friend of mine put it, "Love is the fidelity between ecstasies." When you feel like a quick, jabbing remark, yet you hold your tongue: that is a moment of real love. When you want to take care of yourself, but you choose to seek the other's interests: that is a moment of real love. It is *choosing* the good of the other person not for favors or what it will gain you, but because that person is another child of God. That is love.

In the Gospel today, Jesus says some hard things to the people in His hometown. They don't like it, to put it mildly. In fact, they try to murder Him (they want to throw Him off a cliff... quite literally). Modern sensibilities would say that Jesus was being harsh, instigating what needn't be instigated. It would say He wasn't tolerant, and so wasn't loving. Yet, Jesus is God, and love is the very essence of who He is and everything He does. He speak out in love, not because He will be liked or acclaimed, but even when He is hated, because He wants these people to have eternal life. He wants, He *chooses* their greatest good, even at His own expense. Sometimes, love feels harsh, even when it so longs and desires for the good of the other.

So how do we live love? Most of us have a good idea, even if we often fail. Love looks like the small sacrifices we make of ourselves for the other. It is getting up before dawn to drive hours for work to provide for the family. It is thanklessly making lunch for our children. It is holding our tongue when we could give a biting remark. It may even look like telling a loved one a hard truth when it is not welcome, but desperately needed. Love endures all things, even when... especially when... the last thing you want to do is endure.

This is the incredible love God has for us. This is the love of Christ from the Cross. This is the love God commands us to have for each other. Let us beg for the grace truly to love, and may we be open to that grace which conforms us to the very Heart of the God who is love.