



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend, Jesus tells us how much He loves us: **“As the Father loves me, so I also love you”** (John 15:9). We can pass by that line pretty easily, but it really should shock us. Jesus loves us to the same degree and in the same way that the eternal Father loves the eternal Son!

So much of our lives are surrounded by conditional love. Even the love that is given freely and without counting the cost can sometimes be experienced as conditional.

What do I mean by that? Growing up, our loving parents may have told us how much they love us. But often it comes out when we do something good. “Thank you for doing this... I love you so much!”

When we do something bad (little disobediences, for example), instead of feeling the love (which often is still there) from our parents, we feel shame, disappointment, and that we are being deprived of love. This feeling may come because we’re being (justly) punished, but also because our parents, in that moment, may not remind us of how much they love us.

What does this do to us if we experience it? It trains us to believe that love must be earned. When I am “good” I am loved. When I am “bad” I am punished. We might not be able to describe this feeling at the time, but it shapes us in how we seek love and attention.

When this experience is then transferred to our relationship with God, we look at our sin, our brokenness, our inability to keep our resolutions, and we wonder whether or not we are really loved by God. “Oh yes,” we think, “God loves me when I do something good, but does He *really* love *me* no matter what?” The truth is, of course, that He does. In fact, He has revealed through the mystics that He loves especially, *especially* those most in need of His mercy. Jesus shows that it is the lost sheep He will not fail to go after, it is for the lost coin He searches diligently!

Even though we know this intellectually, we have to allow it to penetrate our hearts. Jesus is calling us to hear His words: **“As the Father loves me, so I also love you.”** He’s not saying He’ll love us this way when we get our act together. He’s not saying He’ll love us like this after we go to Confession. He loves us like this right here, right now.

St. Teresa of Calcutta said that we have to hear this love, this thirst of Christ for us every day, that we have to allow it to penetrate our hearts. She invited each of her sisters to listen everyday in the Eucharistic Chapel to hear Jesus’ words “I thirst” in her soul. I invite you to do the same. You may not be able to get to the Chapel every day (though it is open 24/7 for anyone who desires to spend time with the Lord), but if we are to have any sort of real life in the Spirit, we must have that intimate connection with Jesus every single day!

I invite you to spend time with these words, **“As the Father loves me, so I also love you.”** Breathe with them. Let them penetrate. Allow Jesus’ incredible and overwhelming love to flood through your life. Everything else in your life will be better when you know this love, this thirst of Christ deep down in your soul.