

## LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) is a household name and one of the famous figures of the non-violence movement. While studying and practising law, Gandhi was exposed to Christianity, and he even started reading the bible due to one of his friends who advised him to do so. Although he did not understand part of the Old Testament, Gandhi was won over by the New Testament, especially by the Sermon on the Mount and by the Cross of Christ. Gandhi described the Sermon on the Mount as the summary of Christianity for anyone who wants to live a good Christian life. According to him, the Sermon on the Mount went straight into his heart and got him fired up since he found in it, the biggest recipe for a good and non-violent life. Gandhi regarded Jesus as one of the greatest teachers of humanity and always insisted that Jesus occupied a great place in his heart and had a considerable influence in his life. Having been exposed to the core tenets of Christianity, while living with Christians in England, South Africa and India, Gandhi expected to experience in them those qualities of Christ that he read about in the bible, like unconditional love, forgiveness, willingness to sacrifice, and meekness; to his utmost dismay and disappointment, Christians in his era never lived up to the standards preached by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount and on the Cross. At one point, Gandhi explored becoming a Christian but an experience he had in the Apartheid South Africa drove me away for good. When Gandhi reached the door of a church, the church elder said to him: “Where do you think you are going, black man? There is no room for blacks in this church. Get out of here or I'll have my assistants throw you down the steps.” Gandhi did not waste any time, he said to the man – **“I love your Christ, but I hate your Christians because your Christians are unlike your Christ; they do not put into practice their religious principles.”** The core religious principle of Christianity is what we are presented with today in all the readings of this Sunday; that core principle of Christianity is – **Love one another as I have loved you.**

In our Gospel pericope from John Chapter 15 which is the second part of Jesus' Farewell Discourse with His disciples, we encounter the one command of Christ to all of us – ***Agapate allelous kathos egapesa hymas*** – Love one another as I have loved you. It is interesting to note that both in the Greek and English versions of this Gospel pericope, the word – Love, appears 9 times; however, the type of love used therein is **Agape** which is Self-Sacrificing Love. In his First Papal Encyclical of 2005, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI unpacked what Agape is all about. According to him, “Agape expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead, it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation, and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice.” It is imperative to understand that for any love to be Agape, it must be willing to sacrifice something of us and about us. That is why Christ qualified this Christian Love by telling us in today's Gospel that: “A man can have no greater

love than to lay down his life for his friends.” This same agape love motif is carried through in today’s Second Reading from the First Letter of St John Chapter 4; John reminds us that since God is love and love comes from God, we must love one another; anyone who fails to love can never boast of having known God. This Self-Sacrificing Love of God is equally a Radical Love that knows no boundaries and does not discriminate against anyone as we encounter in today’s First Reading from Acts Chapter 10. Although the gentile Cornelius and his household were seen to be outside of God’s love since they had not been baptised; however, because of their openness and acceptance of the Good News, the Lord gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit in the same way the disciples received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. By so doing, God made it clear that His Love is there for all no matter their backgrounds, beliefs, and differences in life.

My friends, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church #1827, loving one another as Christ loves us is the source and the goal of all Christian Practice. This is so simple and trips off the tongue, but it is true in our lives? It is easier to love those who love us, agree with us, and do not challenge us; it becomes very difficult to love those who do not see things from the same binoculars as we do. As followers of Christ, we are called to love those members of our families that drive us mad and give us sleepless nights; every family has its own share of such people, and I do too. We are summoned to love our neighbours especially those who play loud music when we are trying to have a nap or watch an interesting movie. There are those neighbours around us who can equally be a pain for us, that they will neither see any good in us nor help us out when we are in need; yes, we are called to love them. It might be our love rather than our preaching to them that might convert them.

Coming to our parish community, we are called to ensure that we love everyone and there are no cliques at all. One of our parishioners asked to have a meeting with me last week and we met at the presbytery. During her one and half hours meeting with me, she sobbed her eyes out while narrating to me some of her past experiences of the parish. According to her, she wanted to join some groups within the parish to help others; however, in all those groups she joined, she found herself as the outside because people were in cliques and never allowed anyone who was not part of them to be involved. She pleaded with me never to allow any cliques to form in our parish ever again and I assured her there are no cliques now and there will not be any in the future. My friends, if we are to love one another as Christ loves us, then forming cliques in the parish must be a thing of the past. We need to prove Gandhi wrong by taking seriously our core religious principle from Christ which is: **Love one another as I have loved you.**

**Fr Johnpromise Umeozuru**

**Homily for the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year B (05/05/2024)**