

Father O'Connor's Homily for 18 May 2025
Fifth Sunday of Easter – C

Acts of the Apostles 14: 21-27
Revelation 21: 1-5a
John 13: 31-33a, 34-35

Someone made a collection of things that children had written about love. Here are a few of them.

The question was, “What do most people do on a date?” A boy wrote, “On the first date, they just tell each other lies. And that usually gets them interested enough to go out for a second date.”

The question was, “When is it OK to kiss someone?” A boy wrote, “You should never kiss a girl unless you have enough money to buy her a big ring and her own big-screen television with a DVD player, because she will want to watch videos of the wedding.”

The next question was, “Is it better to be single or married?” A girl wrote, “It is better for girls to be single, but not for boys. Boys need someone to clean up after them.”

And then this question, “Why do people in love hold hands?” A boy wrote, “They want to make sure that their rings don’t fall off, because they paid big bucks for them.”

As those answers demonstrate, it is very easy to misunderstand what real love is. Today’s Gospel is a very important teaching that Jesus gave us at the Last Supper about Christian love. Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment: love one another.” Jesus is teaching us that we might do all kinds of good things in our parishes and in our communities, but if we do not really love the people that we are trying to help, we have missed the whole point of the Gospel.

Charlie Brown was getting after Lucy one day when she was in one of her “moods.” He told her, “Lucy, for heaven’s sake, you have to be a little more loving because what the world needs now is love, sweet love.” And Lucy famously shot back, “Charlie Brown, I love the world. It’s people that I can’t stand!”

That crack hits home. Any of us can talk in generalities about how much we love the world. But when it comes down to specific people, we can suddenly become very selective. And yet Jesus teaches us today in the Gospel, “I give you a new commandment: love one another.”

Two businessmen were having lunch. As the waitress was serving the soup she lost her grip and spilled a whole bowl down the front of one of the gentlemen. And there he was with his business suit, midday, soaked with chicken noodle soup.

A hush descended upon the restaurant. Some were expecting the manager to come out and fire the waitress. Others were waiting for the man who was wearing the soup to really tell her off. But what amazed everyone was that he stood up very calmly, with noodles hanging from his lapels, and said to her gently, "I am so sorry that this happened to you because I know that you feel embarrassed." And then to try to ease the tension, he added, "And I am really glad right now that I didn't order the chili. That would have really left a stain!"

"I give you a new commandment: love one another." Then Jesus goes on to tell us, "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."

A student was reviewing the Ten Commandments and remarked, "You know, the Ten Commandments really don't tell me too much about what I need to do. They mostly tell me what I'm not supposed to do, and those "thou shalt not commandments" really give me some ideas!"

When you look at the commandments, by and large they are "thou shalt not commandments." Reading the Old Testament, though, we do find passages that tell us to love God and to love our neighbor. But it took the Son of God coming into our world to show us how to do this.

Jesus came into the world and opened His arms on the cross to embrace all of us sinners. He laid down His life and shed every drop of His blood to redeem us. And He tells us today, "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." He gives us the example and He gives us the grace to love just as He has loved us.

The third part of this Gospel passage says, "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Jesus is teaching us that real Christian love is our witness to the world.

A longtime teacher was worried that she was suffering from burnout, and she was very discouraged. She did not know if her third grade students were changing and becoming less disciplined, or if she was changing and losing her effectiveness.

Then her mother died, and they had been very close. She took some time off for the funeral and a few days to settle down. She went back to class with a heavy heart. She was grieving over her mother's death, and she was struggling with her questions about her effectiveness as a teacher. She did her best to conceal her feelings and she put forth her best efforts to teach that day.

She left her classroom to go home at the end of the day. And out in the corridor was Rachel, her most challenging student, picking the last flowers from a pot of chrysanthemums.

“Rachel, what are you doing?”

“Miss Terrell, I thought that these flowers might help you. You know, you used to be like our mother, but not so much any more.”

Miss Terrell felt panic. She thought, “Is it that obvious?” And then she said to Rachel, “What do you mean?”

Rachel said, “Well, a mother loves to be with her children. You used to love to be with us too. But you don’t seem to like us much any more.”

Miss Terrell hesitated for a moment, and then said, “Rachel, I am going through some difficult things right now. And my mother just died.”

“I know, Miss Terrell.” And then she added, “Did your mother live until she died?”

Miss Terrell replied, “What an odd question. Everybody lives until they die.”

“Oh, no,” Rachel answered. “Not everybody. Some people die while they are still walking around. Some people stop being who they were.” And then Rachel said, “Miss Terrell, please don’t die while you are still alive. Be fully alive! Be a mother for us again!”

Out of the mouths of children and of babes often comes wisdom.

How do we show that God is alive in our world? By being alive in the world and actively sharing His life with others.

How do we show that God loves our world? By loving the people in our world and actively sharing His love with them.

“I give you a new commandment: love one another.”

Then Jesus goes on to tell us, “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.”

And finally Jesus gives us our mission as His witnesses, “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”