

Today's readings speak of love. St. John says: ***"God is love."*** Jesus has loved us to the point of laying down His life for us; He can then command us to ***"love one another as I have loved you."***

The greatest act of love, Jesus taking on the sins of the world, was also the greatest agony. The work of salvation was a labor of love. On the physical and emotional level, Jesus was not feeling good during His passion, but completing the work of redemption brought Him joy. It was recounted by a scientist that studied the image on the Shroud of Turin that the tortured body of the man did not match the incredibly peaceful, even joyful expression on his face. The Lord's face showed this peace and joy because His labor of love was completed.

Now what is true for Jesus is true for His saints. We should not think that our love for one another will always be accompanied by beautiful feelings...quite the contrary. A few years ago, Pope Francis made news by seeking out and embracing a man who was terribly disfigured by a skin disease. His patron saint once did the same thing. As a young man, riding his horse one day outside of Assisi, St. Francis came upon a leper.

"From childhood St. Francis had had a horror of lepers. Yet because of an earlier dream in which God had asked Francis to change his life, the formerly dissolute youth saw that something new was being asked of him. He dismounted his horse, pressed a coin into the leper's hand and kissed him." Pope Francis, like St. Francis realized that ***love is not about feeling good but choosing good.***

Many of us have experienced this kind of love from our families, especially our mothers. One of my biggest memories of my mom's sacrifice for the family was to make sure we always had a nice dinner together as a family. I still ask for mom's tuna casserole or meat loaf. She and my dad often host us on Sunday afternoons for a meal and visit.

My mom also sacrificed to send us to Catholic High Schools which as you know aren't cheap. She used to teach piano lessons in our basement to neighborhood kids after school was out. She taught little kids how to read music and proper finger use. I can only imagine the amount of patience that required...but again, it was a labor of love for her own children.

Perhaps you haven't received the love you deserved from your mother or some other person in your life. This is bound to happen on some level but that doesn't mean that we can't choose to love as Christ loved. He doesn't tell us to love one another as they have loved us, but rather ***"love one another as I have loved you."***

The Lord reveals a paradox to us: when we selfishly seek to feel good, we are miserable. But, as every saint and very often our mothers have learned too, when we give ourselves freely, we then receive real joy.

So ultimately, why has the Lord commanded us to love sacrificially and unselfishly as He has? He tells us:

"I have told you this that My joy may be in you and your joy might be complete."

The Lord is Risen,
Fr. Mike

