

Easter Five

May 2, 2010

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in thine eyes, O Lord our strength and Redeemer. Amen

I have struggled at times to understand the concept of God's love. How much love does God give to us? Can we ever lose that love? How do you share this love with others?

At least I am in good company. Jesus used parables as a way to try and describe the kind of love that God offers.

The story of the prodigal son is probably the best example from the Gospels.

Jesus also, was not shy about telling his followers that they needed to give this love to others.

The Good Samaritan shows us this type of love in action.

I recently though came across an example from a science teacher in the Anglican digest that helped me get a better grasp of the kind of love that Jesus is trying to describe.

The teacher wrote, "Think about filling up a cup with water. You can only fill the cup up so far, right? Once it has been filled to the brim, what happens when you try and add more water to it? It overflows."

The same is true of a sponge that is submerged in water, it becomes so saturated it can no longer absorb any more water.

If you try and add more water the bloated sponge begins to pour excess water out of it.

Can we apply this scientific truth to the human spirit? Can we imagine someone becoming so filled up, so saturated with something, that he or she can't take in any more?

Maybe you have seen a champagne tower at a wedding and seen how the champagne flows from the top down into the other glasses filling them up with champagne.

God's love is like that isn't? Picture in your mind God's love overflowing from the disciples filled with the Holy Spirit into a person who is in need of love.

Maybe this person is suffering from an illness, mourning the death of a loved one or dealing with recent job loss.

This writer captured an important truth about the way that God's love should operate in our lives as individual Christians and as a community.

This truth comes directly from the lips of our Lord when he says in this morning's Gospel, *Love one another, Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

The love that our Lord called his followers to display has a special definition, Christ like-love.

For those who knew him best, it was his love that produced their love for others.

It was like the water flowing from the filled up glass in my earlier example.

Jesus' love filled them up. Time and time again in the readings that we have following the resurrection, we hear about how Jesus filled up his frightened disciples.

He appeared in an upper room, he breathed this love upon them.

He met them by the side of a lake and fed them with the overflowing nets of fish.

In fact, Jesus kept loving his disciples, even when they were at their lowest points, he still poured more love into them, so that Jesus' resurrected and abundant love could overflow into others.

In the same way, Jesus' love should fill us up each week, when we gather for worship and nourishment from this altar.

Jesus wants this continuing love that God sends to us overflowing into the lives of others.

Thereby we can fulfill his commandment, "Love one another—just as I have loved you.

Jesus' love is God's love...gracefully and freely given with no strings attached.

Sometimes I have heard this love described as the peace that passes all understanding.

A peace that comes into our lives and hearts that seemingly defies attempts at explanation or categorization.

But yet in another sense, Jesus helps us to understand much of that peace-giving love.

For God gave us Jesus to show us what divine love looks like in human form.

God gave us Jesus, who is love, as God is love so we could see it—see it not so much as a feeling or a excitement or emotion of the longing of one person for another—but rather love that is known by the life and teaching of one who shares the same humanity with each of us.

Or as a theologian once wrote, *God's love is in fact Jesus, the person; love in action; love in life.*

It is the love that fills us and overflows from us. It is the sacrificing love of the cross, the exemplary love of the Good Samaritan, the forgiving love of the prodigal's father that reaches out to those in need, even those who have been our enemies in the past.

One of my favorite prayers has always been the prayer of St. Francis. In a brief and simple way, it focuses on this Christ like love.

It reminds us that God's love can and should make us instruments of God's peace—the very active expression of God's love in our world.

It gives love rather than hatred.

It is God's love that seeks faith over doubt, love that lives through hope rather than despair, love that promotes joy in the midst of sadness, love that allows us to die to self so we maybe born to eternal life.

As soon as Jesus gave his followers this new commandment to love one as he had loved them, our Lord gave them a test to determine if they were indeed overflowing with love onto others.

The test was to examine the response of those within reach of the overflow.

He said, by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

As we think about the quality of our Christian lives, we need to pause for a moment and reflect on how others might view us through our actions? What do they see?

Will they see in us what Jesus commanded? Will they see that we are so filled with God's love that it overflows onto others?

Of course, this challenge is not only about us individually. Does God's love fill our congregations enough that it overflows to others?

How effective is our church, when it comes to sharing God's love with those are in need?

The love of God in our own lives should be just like that overflowing cup of water, just like that water logged sponge, like that endless breath and like that net of fish.

Is this the kind of love you have in your heart? How well do you measure up to the challenge that Jesus gives us?

Love one another—just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this they will know that you are my disciples.