

Part of the first verse of today's Gospel is striking. "When Judas had left them..." (*Jn 13:31*) The presence of evil has left the upper room, the die is cast; the events that lead up to Our Lord's Passion and Death have been set in motion. Without miraculous intervention Jesus will be arrested, tortured and put to the most painful and humiliating death that man in our depravity has ever devised.

With all of this on his mind, the discussion that Jesus leads is not about suffering, not about death, not about persecution, but about love. He addresses his Passion and Death as the act of being glorified. Something that has to rock us back on our heels and leave us off balance. We think of glory as in parades, speeches and awards. The Christ sees glory in obedience to the Father, and demonstrating the depth of his love for us by dying on the Cross.

'It is precisely at this moment as Christ accepts his suffering at the hands of evil men that he shows us the dimension of God's love for the world.' (*Scott Hahn*) He says; "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." (*Jn 13:34*) The Apostles must of thought that following this command would be a bit of a challenge, but not so difficult, after all the Torah commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, human love, and they were all faithful Jews.

Then they live through the horror of the Passion, their leader whom they love, the Christ is laid in the tomb. Eventually it dawns on them that this is the level of love that Jesus was talking about, the willingness to lay down their lives, in thought, word and action even to death for God's people. We know that they internalized and lived this commandment because we are here as Church, and because except for John, the rest of them died as martyrs because of their love for Christ and for us; the men and women who would follow after them.

Love at its very basic form is caring for someone else more than you care for yourself. Most people are capable of this basic form of love, at least in the moment. But to go further, to practice sacrificial love, that is beyond our human capability and so it has to be a gift of the Holy Spirit. As humans we are too weak, unable to develop and maintain the discipline necessary for sacrificial love without divine intervention.

There are many ways of laying down our lives in sacrificial love. In order for our marriages to be fulfilling and fruitful, we must make God and equal partner in the relationship, sacrificing every day for each other and begging for the divine intervention that is the love that comes through a sacramental marriage, that is one that has been blessed by the Church.

Parents are called to lay down their lives for their children in sacrificial love, providing for their spiritual, physical, and mental development as they teach them self-discipline along the way. Most of all, parents teach their children how to love through the example of their own lives.

The Priests and Religious among us sacrifice their entire lives for the sake of our salvation. They give up home, family, children for the kingdom of God; living examples of sacrificial love as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

With the divine intervention of the Holy Spirit some people make great sacrifices, even to the point of risking, and sometimes losing their lives in an act of sacrificial love. That is a level of sacrificial love that ties them directly to the cross and we call their actions courageous and the people who perform them heroes.

Are we capable of being consistent in our practice of sacrificial love? Probably not; we are too human, too weak and subject to temptation to consistently practice sacrificial love in the manner that Jesus calls us to in this new commandment. Before we get discouraged, we need to remember that Jesus isn't asking us to be perfect, he knows us better than that. What he does ask is for us to try. Try to love as he loves and when we fail to reconcile and try to love again.