

Last Sunday, the Lord spoke about our relationship with Him. "I am the vine, you are the branches." This is our first priority, the core of our life as Christians. We are in Jesus and He is in us.

Today's reading speaks about our relationships with others. Jesus says, "Love one another as I have loved you." How can the Lord command us to love? What we all of us thought is that love simply happens. We cannot command a feeling. We don't choose our feelings for today or plan them for tomorrow. Feeling is about "liking" someone and that is not entirely under our control. The Lord is not commanding us to "like" everyone.

Real love, Christ's kind of love, is not a feeling but an act of the will, a decision to make, a commitment to act for the benefit of another no matter how we feel about that individual. Here, the Lord is commanding us to love others, even those we don't particularly like. Christian love is a decision, a commitment to do whatever will serve a person's spiritual benefit, whether we like that individual or not.

The confusion of loving and liking causes many problems today. If we identify married love with a feeling, is that a realistic basis for a lifelong marriage? Is the degree of emotional attraction between two people a guarantee of fidelity? Can anybody guarantee or predict how they will feel tomorrow? Are we willing to base our life on another's feeling? It is like trying to build a house on cotton. When feelings start to change, does that mean that the marriage is at an end? Or could that signal the beginning of a new, more mature and honest relationship? There are too many questions about love, about human love.

If we identify our spiritual life with religious feelings, what happens when those feelings pass as they invariably do? Do we cease being disciples? Does that mean that the Holy Spirit is no longer with us? Has our Baptism into Christ evaporated? Could that possibly be the start of a more mature commitment to Christ that is not dependent on emotion?

If we love only people we like, Jesus asks: How is that deserving of praise? How is that love distinctively Christian? Even the worst of Pharisees loved those they liked. Love is a decision to seek the spiritual good of another whether we like them or not. If we wait for some people to become agreeable or likeable, we might wait forever. So Jesus says that we should love one another as He has loved us.

When we struggle with loving another person who irritates us, we might look at the Lord's love for us. Think not only of His Cross but also of the Lord's dealings with us now. He cares for us, supports and forgives us. No matter what we may have done, He acknowledges us as one of His own and seeks to correct us and move us to assess the direction of our life for our spiritual good.

If we read today's Gospel by seeing love as a decision, a commitment and a mission, a new world of Christ-like living opens up for us. In a time when people are governed so much by emotion and passion, the Gospel calls Jesus' followers to something more realistic, more healthy, more mature and more beneficial — to care about the spiritual well-being of others whether we like them or not. This kind of love has great power to transform our world and great power to transform us.

Today's Gospel reading contains one verse that is the key to genuine holiness, to entering the very life, mind and work of Christ, to understanding what real love is, to rescuing ourselves from easy and deceptive

sentimentality in our spiritual life. It is when Jesus, on His way through the vines to Gethsemane, says that we should love one another as He loves us.

That is a mission that can fill and fulfill a lifetime.