



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-January 30th 2022

Readings: Jeremiah 1: 4-5 17-19, Psalm 70, 1 Corinthians 12: 31-13: 13,

Luke 4: 21-30

LOVE is a very comprehensive word. It is also, in English, very flexible and inexact. I can employ it for anything from the extraordinarily trivial to the life changingly profound. I'd love an ice cream. I love you and want to marry you. It covers everything from the momentary whim, through the transient and urgent emotion through to the fixed, unshakeable commitment of the heart. In Greek of course, the language of the New Testament, there are a variety of words to cover this very different tasks.

Eros covers the erotic, sexual love. Storge represents family commitment love. Philo speaks of friendship and affection – a philosopher is a companion of wisdom. A bibliophile loves books. There is even a word for what used to be regarded as a dangerous narcissism but is now thought , by modern philosophies as essential to our well being – Philautia – a love and prioritisation of the self. The need, of course, for man is not to love himself but to know himself to be loved. From this essential reassurance of his loveability comes both healing and

self worth and self respect and the ability to love We may even include Mania – obsessive passion – ‘mad about the girl’ through to predation and stalking.

Paul uses none of these. He uses the word AGAPE. This is a word that conveys the unconditional and unshakeable love of God for Man and Man’s attempted response to that. It is the word used by Jesus in His promulgation of the two Great Commandments.

First of all St. Paul reminds us that all these things which he has previously listed are gifts. They are gifts of God and, like children at Christmas, we are to pray for these gifts. And, when the chips are down and we are taking stock of our spiritual journey, today’s passage provides a good check list. (I find it useful before going to Confession.)

Paul lists the showier gifts and gets down to clearing the ground. If I talk to you with great eloquence but don’t love you, I am a noisy windbag. Big ta-ra – no product. If I am a clever clogs but don’t love you – it’s very impressive but utterly vacuous. If I am very generous but because I want you to know how generous I am, not because I love you, it’s just a charade. Paul gets right behind the carefully constructed pretence of self worth. This is what love is, he says. Check these out with me and be humbled:

Love is patient and kind – I often fall at the first hurdle here and I am always amazed at God’s patience with me and His patience with the human race. Love does not envy or boast – Envy not an issue but there are, I have discovered, quite a lot of subtle ways of boasting.

Love is not arrogant or rude. Oh dear, more failure.

Love does not insist on its own way. There are, of course, more manipulative ways of saying 'My way or the highway'. We all have favourite techniques for getting our own way, sulks, emotional blackmail, being 'offended', spiritual deafness etc etc

Love is not irritable or resentful. This is often a personality trait that needs a lot of work and divine healing. It's a learnt defence that gets in the way of friendship. Resentment eats at the heart of the soul.

Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing. How tricky it is not to give an inward whoop of joy when someone we don't like screws up.

Love rejoices with the truth. It wants the best for all. It is Christ on the Cross for you and for me.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Love which is truly love- and not this ersatz saccharine confection of popular culture- will bear all, endure all and never end. It is total and sacrificial. It is not about my personal comfort or preference but about the good of the other. It is salvific. It is Christ on the Cross for me and for you.

And it is supported by the two other great gifts, Faith and Hope. They are useless without love but Love cannot endure and fulfil its task without them.

Faith is an exercise of supreme trust. We do not bestow it lightly. We place our faith in those whom we have learned to trust and who, by their actions, have demonstrated their love for us and their constant and consistent intention for our wellbeing. There are human exemplars but

supremely we look to the unchanging love of God. Faithfulness opens the possibility of self- abandonment to the other and the fullness of our becoming in love. Unfaithfulness wounds love.

And Hope. Hope is not the unreasonable expectation of the fantastic but the stretching out in longing which fixes our gaze on the far horizon and makes the spiritual space for faithfulness and love to lead us on to the fulfilment of the Divine. Hopelessness is the portal of the damned.

Now, as St. Paul says, we see through a glass darkly. Then we shall see face to face and know as fully as we are known by God. Faith, Hope and Love, the three great theological virtues, revolve around and support each other. Love is the great ringmaster of the soul. Love is Christ on the Cross for you and for me.