

“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”

I’d say most of us are familiar with these words from today’s second reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians in that this passage is one of the most popular when it comes to weddings, and rightfully so, because these are some of the most beautiful words in all of Sacred Scripture. Yet these beautiful words of St. Paul don’t just apply to newly married couples in the context of a wedding. Rather, these Heavenly words apply to *every baptized disciple* of Christ, regardless of one’s vocation and state in life.

St. Paul writes, “If I speak in human and angelic tongues, *but do not have love*, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; *if I have all faith* so as to move mountains, *but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my*

*body over so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing...*

So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

In other words, we can have all of the money, knowledge, and material possessions in the world, the greatest professional success, the biggest house, the most powerful position in the company, the most academic degrees and initials after our name, *but if we don't have love, we have nothing!* Brothers and sisters, our individual salvation depends *not* on how much we own, how much we know, and how much we have, but on *how much we love*. And specifically, how much we love God *and* neighbor in response to the grace and love that's been poured out to us through our Savior Jesus Christ.

Now it's *always* a good time to clarify the authentic meaning of love and to dispel any false and destructive notions of love. Let me first clarify what love is *not*: love is *not* some superficial, fluffy puffy feeling that comes and goes with our moods, nor is it some selfish, appeasing, and pandering attitude that says, “Oh just do whatever you want—do whatever makes you feel good and whatever makes you happy, even if what you're doing is objectively wrong and harmful to yourself and

others, offensive to God, and contrary to His law and the teachings of His Church.” That’s not love.

*True love* is a stable disposition of the will where one freely seeks the *authentic* good of another *purely for the sake of the other* and *then acts* on that desire! True love is honest in that it *always* tells the truth, even if the truth is hard to accept. Through the second reading today from St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, the Lord gives us the defining characteristics of true love. And yet the Lord doesn’t just teach us about love through words, He *literally shows us how to love* by *how He lived, suffered, and died*.

Moreover, let me make a key clarification and distinction that many people seemingly don’t understand. And please don’t misunderstand me, I’m not trying to be graphic in any way. But in our seemingly hedonistic culture that is *obsessed* with sex in an extremely unhealthy and disturbing way—in a culture that takes the beautiful gift of sex and turns it into a false god that must be worshipped and appeased at all costs: *love is not restricted to sex!* In other words, our culture limits and reduces love to sex, so much so that our culture literally

brainwashes people to think, “well if I can’t have sex, then I can’t have love.” Brothers and sisters, that is a destructive and outright lie! Such a despicable lie!

First of all, *every* human person is created *out of love* and *for love*. *Every person* is created for authentic love and happiness, which *ultimately* comes to us from an intimate relationship with God, *Who is Love!* Secondly, there is a fundamental, common-sense principle that our hedonistic culture *refuses* to accept: certainly, *all sex requires love, not all love requires sex*. The beautiful gift of sexuality is meant to be enjoyed within the context of marital love, a love that unites a husband and wife and inspires them to be selflessly open to the wonderful gift of life—the gift of children.

Moreover, the *greatest* expression and *manifestation* of love was *totally non-sexual in nature* and it was displayed by our Lord Jesus Christ when He sacrificed Himself for us on the cross in order to save us from sin and death—our Lord Jesus, *Who is Love incarnate*. There’s *no greater manifestation and proof of God’s love than Christ crucified on the cross*. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, if you want a visual

definition of love, then simply look to any crucifix. If you want to see our second reading today from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians illustrated *visually*, then look to any crucifix.

The crucifix reminds us of many things: it reminds us of just how much God loves us and how intimately united He is to us when we suffer. It reminds us of what *love actually is—total self-gift and heroic sacrifice for the good of another; humble surrender to the will of God.* The crucifix reminds us that as disciples of Jesus, we are called *to love as He loves—to humbly die to ourselves for the good of another!*

Lastly, the crucifix reminds us that if *we love as Jesus loves*, then we will face rejection and suffering as He did. In fact, today's Gospel from Luke reminds us that the Love that God offers us and the Love that *He is in His very nature*, is a rejected love. True love can hurt and at times it can be painful—but this is what love does: it bears all things and endures all things as the Lord tells us today in the second reading. Suffering tests and purifies our love. And if we cooperate with the grace of God, suffering can deepen and strengthen our love for Christ and others.

St. Thomas Aquinas, the saint from the 13th century whose feast day we celebrated this past week and who's probably the greatest Doctor of the Church and one of the greatest philosophers in human history, wrote that the "cross exemplifies every virtue!"

So brothers and sisters, if you don't have a crucifix in your home, your bedroom, your kitchen, your car, your desk at work, or wherever else you may live your life, I simply encourage you to consider getting one and placing it somewhere visible to you. For instance, I have a small crucifix in my car that helps me to be a more patient and loving driver, especially when other blessed souls are driving me insane on the road. Having a crucifix around where we live and work is a simple, practical, yet powerful reminder of the great love that God has for us and the love we're called to embody with every fiber of our being as disciples of Christ.

So as we prepare to worship and receive our Lord Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist, let's thank Him for the great love He has for us and ask Him for the grace *to love as He loves* in *every* aspect of our daily lives.