

Love Never Fails

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time - 1 Cor 12:31—13:13

Ave Maria Catholic Church, January 29, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

Today, we welcome our brothers and sisters, catechumens and candidates, who want to be in full communion with the Catholic Church. Who can give a better welcome to you than Saint Paul himself? He tells you in his first letter to the Corinthians: *“Brothers and sisters: Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts.”* Immediately following, as it were a matter of great urgency, he tells you: *“I shall show you a still more excellent way.”*

Saint Paul shows a great urgency because he is speaking about excellence in life. He wants to introduce you to the life of your dreams, to that happy and beautiful life for which you are searching. Then, he says:

“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,” (1 Cor. 12: 13).

Dear brothers and sisters, by entering into the Church, you are entering into a school of love. This is what the Church treasures the most because if you have the greatest eloquence, the most sophisticated science, the strongest faith, and the greatest spirit of sacrifice, but you do not have love, you gain nothing.

Now, you may ask: what is love? This is an important question because the word love has been misused, and for that reason, it is difficult to understand what love means.

Let us start by saying what love is not. Saint Paul teaches: *“Love 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.”* (1 Cor. 12: 13).

In other words, a sinful action will never be an act of love. Paint it any way you wish, color those actions or words any way you want, but a sinful action will never be an act of love. It might be a caricature of love, but it will never be an act of love. If you truly love, you will reject evil in your life and in the life of others. If you truly love, you will reject sin. The person who commits a sinful action breaks the order of love: by offending God who must be loved first with the whole heart, mind, and soul, and by bringing shame to himself and others for the abuse of God’s gifts.

Now we know what love is not, but we still need to know what love truly is. Again, Saint Paul comes to our aid as he teaches: *“Love is patient, love is kind . . . it rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”*

What does it mean to love in this way?

Some people say, “I love my neighbor, and to prove it, I smile and act very politely towards him.” “That is all very good,” says St. Bernard, “but that’s just the minimum degree of love.”

Another says, “I do better than that, because my brothers are so dear to me that I make it my duty to help them every chance I have.” This second degree is better, but still, it is not enough.

“Well then,” says a third, “I love my brothers so much that I use my possessions to assist them.” “Now there,” says St. Bernard, “is an act which announces a very high and very excellent degree of love; but it is still not the most perfect.”

There is still a fourth degree of love that goes beyond those actions. What is it? It is to be able to say in all honesty, like St. Paul, *‘Be followers of me as I also am of Christ’* (1 Cor 4,16 and 11,1). In other words, just as Jesus Christ gave his work, his strength, his blood, his merits, his life, and sacrificed himself completely for the good and salvation of us all, so I am ready to sacrifice my work, my strength, my health, and my life for my brothers. Is that not Jesus’s invitation? He tells us: *“I give you a new commandment: love one another; As I have loved you, so you also should love one another,”* (Jn 13:34).

Dear brothers and sisters, by entering into the Church, you are entering into a school of love, and in this school, there is only one teacher and master, and He is Christ himself. He is the model you must contemplate, He is the example you must imitate, He is the path you must follow.

Now, the question is: how does Jesus love?

First, Jesus rejects evil and he wants to separate us from evil. It would be sufficient to quote that passage of the gospel when *“Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all those engaged in selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. And he said to them, ‘It is written: ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a den of thieves.’ [Then] the blind and the lame approached him in the temple area, and he cured them.”* (Mt 21: 12-14). That is the loving Jesus, that is the sweet Jesus, who corrects us with a whip when we try to make God’s house a den of thieves, but who at the same time is ready to heal our blindness and crookedness.

Second, Jesus is never overcome by evil, but overcomes evil with good. Let us contemplate that scene at the Mount of Olives. Judas went over to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and he kissed him. Jesus answered him, "Friend," (Mt. 26: 49-50), as if he were looking for the heart of Judas. That is an amazing image, after receiving the kiss of treason, Jesus calls Judas "friend." Jesus is not overcome by evil, but he is merciful and kind, and for that reason, He simply asks: "*Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?*" (Lk. 22: 48).

Third, Jesus's generous forgiveness goes to the extreme. He was despised by the Pharisees and Sadducees, detested by the high priests, condemned by the Jewish people, tormented by the Romans, insulted by those who passed by, and betrayed and abandoned by his friends. However, from there, from the cross, Jesus's words were: "*Father, forgive them, they know not what they do,*" (Lc. 23:34). Jesus forgives us. Jesus excuses us.

Fourth, Jesus's love goes above and beyond. He taught us: "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends,*" (Jn 15:13). And he gave his life for us all even when we were not his friends, when we were separated from him because of our sins. Jesus's love goes above and beyond. We see his love in the sign of the cross. This is the sign with which you are marked when you enter into the Church.

When we enter into the Church, we enter into the school of Jesus. We must learn from Him! Let us listen to his words: "*This is my commandment: love one another as I love you . . . You are my friends if you do what I command you . . . love one another as I love you,*" (Jn 15: 12.14). By entering into the Church, you accept the beautiful task of listening to his words, and by receiving his teachings, you accept the glorious challenge of imitating his life.

You and I, every one of us must learn Jesus! In striving to accomplish this, we will never be disappointed because as Saint Paul indicates in his first letter to the Corinthians: "*love never fails.*" God's love never fails, the love of Jesus never fails, true love never fails. Let us learn Jesus and we will never be disappointed. Amen.