

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

I think Jesus and John the evangelist were Beatles' fans.

And their favorite song is this one: Love, Love Love

(All you need is love)

I admit, the Greek translation does not work as well musically:

Agape, agape, agape...

το μόνο που χρειάζεσαι είναι αγάπη.

Whether or not the Beatles are in the repertoire of the heavenly choir of angels along with Bach and Brahms is arguable,

but the importance to *God* of agape love is indisputable.

And if it is important to *God*, it is – or ought to be – important to us.

That's what Jesus says in today's Gospel:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

For those of you who participated in Maundy Thursday worship, you heard this passage from John 13 then, too.

This new commandment is the basis for the name “Maundy” from the Latin “mandatum”, mandate or command.

It is new because it is a new kind of love for human beings to share.

It is a love defined by God, not by human emotion.

- Agape love is not erotic, sexual love;
- Agape is not the love of friendship or obsession, philia.
- Agape is not the love of family, or loyalty – storge.

All those forms of love are fragile, subject to distortion.

They invite envy, jealousy, vengeance, retribution, betrayal.

Agape love is of God and is defined by Jesus.

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

How did Jesus love his disciples?

- He chose them for God
 - He taught them God's ways
 - He fed them God's food
 - He revealed himself to them as God present with them
- But most importantly – and this is the aspect of agape that the Gospel speaks most clearly of –
- Jesus gave his life for them.**
He died for them so that they could live God's life.

Jesus says: There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command.

Lay down one's life means to be willing to die.

Agape love is not gushy feelings, or accommodation of others' desires,

Agape love is being willing to die so that someone else can see how much God loves.

Agape love is being willing to die so that God's eternal life can be revealed.

I don't want to be morbid about this – this is not a call to suicide. It is not self-inflicted death or suffering that Jesus is commanding here.

Far from it.

It is the willingness to accept the possibility that I may lose my life leading others to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

It is the sacrificial love that places nothing –not even my own life – above God's love for you **because we know that death is not the end.**

St. Paul put it this way in 2 Cor. 4: *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.* ¹² *So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*

Remember Paul and Silas in prison in Acts 16? They were thrown in jail and shackled for preaching and teaching about Jesus.

While in prison, they continued to bear witness by singing hymns and praying aloud so that the other prisoners could hear them.

They were ready to lay down their lives, but would continue to live in Christ to the fullest extent.

God freed them with an earthquake, resulting in the baptism of the jailer and all those who were in his house.

Agape love means doing everything possible so that others can see Christ crucified and place their trust in him.

Jesus concludes today's Gospel:

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Jesus was not the only teacher who had disciples.

Every rabbi had disciples – a word that simply means students.

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle had disciples.

John the Baptist had disciples.

Within the Jewish community, rabbis varied in their teaching of the Torah – consider the disagreements between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, for example.

So, Jesus is making an important point here:

Of all the teachers and students out there, people will know that you belong to me when they see your agape love for one another.

No other rabbi, no other philosopher, no other prophet could teach agape love except the One who actually laid down his life for his students – indeed, for all humanity.

Therefore, no other students – no other disciples – except those taught and formed in the ways of Jesus --can love with agape love.

That is what Jesus has given us as his new commandment.

A commandment he has doubled by commanding us to teach agape love to those whom we make disciples, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

...

The relationships among us Christians and between us and non-believers are supposed to be different from raw human nature.

I know, our natural impulses make for entertaining drama and literature, but they do not lead to eternal life.

Jesus shows us how to love with agape love:

By showing grace, mercy, forgiveness, peace, wisdom, and obedience to God, even to laying down his life.

Then he was raised to new life so that we, too, might live with agape love.

I am no expert in this love – I often fail miserably at it.

Truly, none of us can share agape without the Holy Spirit guiding us.

But we do have the Spirit with us,

and we are embraced in this gracious agape love daily, so that we can share it.

The Beatles were right.... Sort of.

All you need is God's love, all you need is love.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!