

Homily – As I Have Loved You

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Back in 2001, I started the public stage of coming out. At that time, and even still today, sometimes I get the following response. A person will say, "I love you, but I think what you are doing is wrong." There are several variations on this. "I love, you but I can't support you in your choice." Or, "I love you, but you are making God angry... or, it is against the teachings of the Bible... or, I am afraid for your soul." Each of these phrases starts with "I love you, but..." and as they said this to me each person genuinely believed that they are acting out of love.

It would be easy for me to respond by rejecting the person, or analyzing how they must have been mistreated at some point in their life. It would be easy, but I want to stay in a place that says these people are acting out of love. After all, I can imagine making my own "I love you, but" statements. "I love you, but you are in a bad relationship." Or, "I love you, but you need to consider getting a job." Or, "I love you, but the heroin has got to go." I would like to think that my own statements are out of love and genuine concern for a person, so I can make room for the love that may be contained in those other statements that I don't like.

Now, here is a simple definition of love. "Love is a strong emotional attachment to another." Let me repeat that. "Love is a strong emotional attachment to another." In today's Gospel reading we heard Jesus say, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." And, if we replace the word love with our simple definition, then we have... "Just as I have had a strong emotional attachment to you, you should also have a strong emotional attachments with one another." This sounds a little sterile, but it works. This simple definition also works with our tough love statements. I have a strong emotional attachment to you, but what you are doing is wrong. Again this seems a little sterile, but the definition works.

However, it does not help us understand how two people on opposite ends of an issue can both say they are acting or speaking out of love. One person might say, "out of my love of the family, I think abortion should be available. However, a second person might say, "out of my love of the family, I think abortion should be off the table." Two love statements that go different places.

Love is not as easy to define as we might think for it can have several different meanings depending on the context and culture. Ancient Greeks had multiple distinct words for what we try to cover with our single word "love"; these include philia (friendship), eros (passion), storge (familial love), and agape (infinite or divine love). And, there are a lot more definitions of love. In Jewish tradition, love is often shown

as the love that God has for creation. And, rabbinic tradition shows that our own love can be developed by contemplating divine deeds or witnessing the marvels of nature. In Islamic tradition, love encompasses the universal brotherhood that applies to all who hold faith. In Buddhism, Karuṇā is compassion and mercy, which reduces the suffering of others. It is complementary to wisdom and is necessary for enlightenment. Mettā is benevolent love. This love is unconditional and requires considerable self-acceptance. In Hinduism, prema – or prem – refers to elevated love. Karuna is compassion and mercy, which impels one to help reduce the suffering of others.

I've thrown a lot of definitions of love at you, and my goal was to show you that there are both a variety of definitions, but there is also a common thread across many cultures. Love has something to do with getting outside oneself and connecting. Love is closely correlated to healthy relationship.

Here are some other descriptors of love. Friends confront the world side by side and lovers live face to face. And, in very special relationships one is both side to side and face to face. And, "love is like a mirror. When I love another, he or she becomes my mirror and I become theirs, and reflecting in each other's love we see infinity!"

And here are a few truths about love for us to reflect on... "One cannot give what one does not possess. To give love you must possess love.

One cannot teach what one does not understand. To teach love one must comprehend love.

One cannot know what one does not study. To study love you must live in love.

One cannot appreciate what one does not recognize. To recognize love you must be receptive to love.

One cannot have doubt about that which one wishes to trust. To trust love you must be convinced of love.

One cannot admit what one does not yield to. To yield to love one must be vulnerable to love.

One cannot live what one does not dedicate oneself to. To dedicate yourself to love you must be forever growing in love."

Sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists would say that love is a learned phenomenon. "So, if you don't like where you are in terms of love, you can change it, you can create new capacity to give and receive love. But, you can only give away what you have. That's the miracle. If you have love, you can give it. If you don't have it, you don't have it to give. Actually, it's not really even a matter of giving. It's a matter of sharing. And, whatever we share, we don't lose because we still have it."

And, like any worthy thing, love must be practiced. And, when we practice love we improve in capacity and capability. "Each person has potential for love, but potential is never realized without work. This does not mean pain. Love, especially, is learned best in wonder, in joy, in peace, and in living."

And here is something I have learned in my own spiritual journey. We need to fall back into the eternal and unchanging love of God that is surrounding each and every one of us. We need to recognize that we are the beloved of God and that every other person is also the beloved of God. We must respond to God's love by loving God back, by loving others, by loving ourselves, and by loving the rest of non-human creation.

I'm still trying to learn how to love every day of my life. As we endeavor to put love into action, we come to realize that on our own, we are unable to obey Jesus' command to "Love one another as I have loved you." To love as Jesus loves, we must be connected to the Source of love. Many find that connection in solitude, silence, and some form of contemplative prayer. Contemplation quiets the monkey mind and teaches us emotional sobriety and psychological freedom from our addictions and attachments. So, even when we differ in our views, and even when our love-based actions take us in different directions, I invite us all to bask in the love of God and recognize that God love us and loves every other person as well. Let us love one another even when the other is not the same as we are.

As I conclude here is a poem that gets at one thing we can do to practice love. The poem is by Edwina Gateley and its title is "Let Your God Love You".

Be silent.
Be still.
Alone.
Empty
Before your God.
Say nothing.
Ask nothing.
Be silent.
Be still.
Let your God look upon you.
That is all.
God knows.
God understands.
God loves you
With an enormous love,
And only wants
To look upon you

With that love.
Quiet.
Still.
Be.

Let your God—
Love you.