

Many years ago, a manager shared a story with me about an employee that he had hired. For the sake of the story, we will call him Jim. Originally, Jim was a contractor, and he was the hardest worker in his division. When his division got a job opening, they eagerly hired him on as a direct employee. You can imagine their shock when he quickly became just as lazy as the other employees. When they questioned him about this, Jim responded that he had worked hard to make sure that he was hired full-time, and now that he had achieved that, he could take it easy.

This story jumped into my mind when I was reflecting on today's readings. In our Gospel, Jesus tells us, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you should also love one another." In order to understand what Jesus is telling us, we must first understand what He means by love. English is a little impoverished in the sense that we have a single word for love that carries all sorts of different meanings. The Greeks, on the other hand, had four different words which they used for love: *philia*, *storge*, *eros*, and *agape*. "Philia" is the love of friendship. "Storge" is the natural love felt between families. "Eros" is the erotic love felt between persons. Finally, "agape" is a universal, unconditional love that transcends boundaries of space and time.

When we look at Jesus' command to love in the original Greek, He is commanding us to live out this final type of "agape" love. "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." So, if we want to understand the way that Jesus understood "agape" love, then we must look at the way in which He first loved us.

As we know, throughout His life Jesus went about teaching about His Father's great love for us. He would then demonstrate this love by healing the sick and eating with sinners. Only after revealing His great love for them would He then invite all those whom He had encountered to turn away from sin and embrace their Father's

love. He then sealed and crowned this message of love by His death on the Cross through which He opened the Gates of Paradise for all those who believe.

Jesus' "agape" love is a sacrificial love that transcends the boundaries of time and space and unlocks the Gates of Paradise for us. There is a catch, however. We can only pass through these gates if we also love as He did, giving of ourselves to others through this same sacrificial "agape" love as well. As we heard in our first reading, "it is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." This helps us to understand more clearly that the love to which we have been called is always oriented first and foremost towards bringing ourselves and those around us to Heaven.

As I reflect on this, it strikes me that there are two aspects of Christ's love which we must emulate if we are going to love as Christ did. We must both teach the truths which Christ entrusted to us as well as physically manifest the truth of this message through our sacrificial love for those around us. And yet, there is an inherent tension that exists in these two aspects of Christian love... between the need to condemn sin and the need to love sinners without condemnation. As human beings, it is hard to reconcile these two things. Even in Jesus time, people struggled to understand this tension in His message. Think back to some of the accusations made against Him. Some condemned Him for eating and drinking with sinners, while others condemned Him because His teachings on morality seemed too hard.

Despite this, Jesus never stopped both loving those before Him without hesitation while still calling them to turn from sin and follow Him. Sadly, we do not always do such a good job. Often, we will fail and fall to one side or the other. We might condemn people for their sinfulness, but forget the message of love. Conversely, we might love people and invite them to sit at table with us, but fall short in challenging them to turn away from their sinfulness. It is only when we

manage to hold these two tensions together that we will love as Jesus loved. One cannot exist without the other because there is no truth without pastoral charity, and likewise there is no pastoral charity without truth.

There are many different examples of how this failure to truly love manifests itself in the life of the Church, but for today I am going to highlight it with individual Christians response to homosexuality. Some people will use the Church's teachings on human sexuality to say that homosexuals should be barred from the Church. Others, however, recognize that homosexuals have just as much a right to be in the Church as anyone else, but they then refuse to call them to holiness. In the end, both of these extremes are wrong. All people, no matter their struggle, have a place in the Church while at the same time, all people, no matter their struggle, must always be called to turn away from sin and embrace the Gospel.

If we want to be faithful to the charge that we have been given and love as Christ loved, then we must discover what true Christian love means. As Pope Francis says often, we must meet people where they are, loving them as they are even in the midst of their sinfulness and accompany them on their journey. Once we have shown our love, then we have earned the right to share the truth of the Gospel with them and invite them to holiness.

None of this makes sense unless it is seen in light of our goal of Heaven. If our goal is happiness in this world alone, then we could settle with simply accepting and loving each other as we are. Our goal, however, is not this world but eternal life in Heaven. So we cannot simply rest on our laurels but must lay down our lives for one another out of love in imitation of Christ, so that through our sacrifices for one another and the truth which we profess we might pass together through the gates which He opened for us into eternal life.