

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 6th Sunday Easter Year B

John 15: 13 “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

Jesus tells us what the greatest love possible is: to give completely oneself to another- self-gift, some people call it- not a ‘me-attitude’ at all, but an ‘all you’ attitude and us (other!) Jesus had said similar things before (*maybe not as clear as putting out ‘there is not greater love than to die for another’*) back when he said ‘whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it’ (Mark 8:35). He is talking about fulfillment through sacrifice or ‘realization through transcendence’ or letting go to gain everything (acquisition through surrender). Really, He is remarkably clear and straightforward today saying, “No greater (this is the topmost level) love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends’. I want to begin by saying this, no matter what this weekend happened to be, this reading tells me that we see this kind of love from Jesus in our moms. But especially since we mark Mother’s Day this weekend (thanking God for our moms, which if it weren’t for them, we wouldn’t be here!), we can say Jesus is talking about our mom (all good in the best way). ‘Jesus, you talking about my mom?’ Mom’s give life; don’t we say ‘give birth-give life’. Moms show this love that Jesus talks about, as they ‘lay down their lives for us kids’. Always putting their children first: They feed, nurture, raise, teach their children, giving in countless ways each day to them, maybe each moment when it comes to some of the sacrifices (I’m thinking about the getting up for the umpteenth time overnight to tend to a sick child, even after she told me at dinner, ‘Brian you better stop eating that butter with your spoon!’) Yet, they do that, for it is a mother’s love that sees the child first, not self-not me, but the other-the little one for which she lays down everything else, even her own life for the other..... This happens literally sometimes-maybe we know cases. I am currently reading a biography memoir of Abbot Frederic Dunne. He is the 1st American-born abbot of Gethsemane monastery (here in local KY) -made popular because he was abbot when the famous Thomas Merton joined the KY Trappist monks in 1941. Well, about Frederic Dunne, he lost his mother when he was six years old, as his mother Mary she died in childbirth (5th child), a literal example of giving her life (laying it down) for her child. Her child was spared and she died in the giving life. That is sacrificial love, typical of moms, that Jesus refers to as ‘no love greater’. But even without such a dramatic dying, moms also give & give all the time to their children- I wonder if there is any force stronger in the universe than a mother’s love for her children. Astrophysicists talk about the strong force holding atoms together, but what that compared to a mother’s love? Think: what would a mom not do for her kids?

On mother's Day I always think of all the big and little ways that my own mother taught us kids to be good. A lot of it echoes Jesus saying today, 'Love one another'. How many times does a mom tell kids, 'Get along' 'Make peace' 'Yes, love him he is your brother' 'Help out with this job' 'Come on-this is family.' The biography of Abbot Frederic Dunne, I just mentioned, highlighted about him that everyone called him the most heroically patient man around, (learned from his mom). He was always counselling his monks to be patient/forgiving with each other-telling them 'a life's work takes a lifetime to accomplish, so slow down on the zeal to remake-fix everything as only you like or want it. Well, mom's teach that kind of patience (or is it our bad behavior that trains them in it). Yet as honor to moms (my own), I like a plaque I saw recently, it said 'Of all the things mom gave me, the best gift was that 'she believed in me'. Moms don't give up- they lay down their lives bettering us. And for that we are so thankful today. And we pray for them, and ask God to bless them. Moms teach us too many things to count; the big lessons in life, but we don't want to overlook those little things/treats around the house they teach that make life so much more bearable and joyful! Like mom who always said, 'don't forget to bring a book along, we may have to wait.. be constructive and make time pass more enjoyably'. Or when we complained 'I'm hungry' but nothing in the cabinet sounded good, she would say 'you can always make cinnamon toast!' (and we controlled the amount of sugar added), or how about this one: a great one. My mom taught us kids how to enjoy things together—she taught us boys how to enjoy salt and sweet in our two favorite foods together----She introduced us to mixing popcorn with ice cream before sitting down to watch a movie- if you've never tried it give it a shot-Fill a bag or bowl with your popcorn and take an ice cream cone topped with scooped ice cream, dipping the scoop in the bag. There you have it, popcorn stuck to your ice cream to enjoy-almost a game. The right mix of salt & sweet!

Yet, back to the gospel, Jesus reveals to us what true discipleship is for us-He even calls us to 'friendship' with Him. I think we have to let that sink in just how awesome that Jesus calls us, friends-friendship with God. And how does that happen? By us keeping his words (memories of him) in us (sharing of course), and loving as he loved us. And it gets even better that keeping such friendship with Jesus, brings us to more joy (deep joy) and bears in us fruit.