

## HOMILY

### *The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity* *May 18, 2008*

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When Richard Nixon ran for president in 1968, the Vietnam War was at its height. One of Nixon's TV commercials showed a photo of an American soldier in Vietnam with the word "love" written on his helmet. The image bothered one of Nixon's media men: "It reminds people of Hippies. It's not the sort of thing soldiers should be writing on their helmets." About a week later, a letter arrived from the mother of the soldier. She said how thrilled she was to see the photo of her son in Nixon's TV commercial. She wondered if she could obtain a copy of the photo. The letter was signed "Mrs. William Love." That's an interesting story. The soldier was not making a statement about his feelings at all. He was simply putting his name, Love, on his helmet.

Go with me now, back in history, two thousand years ago. Jesus of Nazareth hangs on a cross. He wears no helmet—only a crown of thorns. Above his head is written neither his name nor his ultimate purpose, though there is a sign that reads "King of the Jews." Yet on that cross, a statement is made—the most radical statement about the nature of love.

What is love? *Love is Jesus Christ giving his life for a sinful world.*

That is love in its purest sense.

That is love without reservation

That is love that seeks nothing else in return.

All other love pales in comparison. A parent loves his or her own children, but each parent expects in return respect and companionship from their children. A spouse loves the other, but expects in return fidelity, emotional support, and physical intimacy. But when Christ loves, when God loves, God loves without condition. John 3:16, the passage that Deacon Dan proclaimed today, sums it up as it can only be summed up:

*"For God so loved the world...."*

Can you think of anything this world is hungrier for than love? A lonely man once programmed his computer to write him love letters each day. He built a voice system that would speak lovingly to him; but he remained lonely. Manufactured, controlled love isn't love at all. Yet that is the only love that many people ever experience. And how we long for something more.

Many of us know that feeling: to love and to be loved. What joy that simple emotion brings into our lives. Then to realize that the very nature of God is love is almost more than you and I can comprehend.

We're told that when early printers, using handset type, received an order to print a collection of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poems, they immediately ordered hundreds of extra letters "L" and "V" for their presses. They knew Tennyson. He used the word "love" so often in his poetry that the average set of type couldn't possibly supply all the necessary letters. It is with the same extravagant love that God loves us. *"For God so loved the world...."* God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. To love as God loves is to give wonderfully, extravagantly without holding anything back.

There is an important principle that we must recognize. Before we are able to give love, we must receive love. Once, years ago, there was a little girl in an institution who was almost like a wild beast. The workers at the institution had written her off as hopeless. An elderly nurse believed there was hope for the child. She felt she could communicate love and hope to this little wild creature. The nurse daily visited the child whom they called Little Annie. But for a long time, Little Annie gave no indication she was aware of her presence. The elderly nurse persisted and repeatedly brought some cookies and left them in her room. Soon the doctors noticed a change. After a period of time, they moved Little Annie upstairs. Finally, the day came when this seemingly "hopeless case" was released. Filled with compassion for others because of her own experience, Little Annie—Anne Sullivan—wanted to help others.

It was Anne Sullivan who in turn played the crucial role in the life of Helen Keller. It was she who saw the potential in this little blind, deaf and rebellious child. She loved her, disciplined her, played, prayed, pushed and worked with her until Helen Keller became an inspiration to the entire world. It began with the elderly nurse, then Anne Sullivan, then Helen Keller, then every person who has ever been influenced by the example of Helen Keller.

The chain of love goes on forever. Before it began with that elderly nurse, however, we have to go all the way back to the beginning when God first loved his creation. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son....”* That’s why the letter of John in the Bible, the word of God tells us “In this is love.” Not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us and gave his son to be the expiation for our sins. Humankind could not love God or one another if we had not first been loved. There is no greater key to the mystery or higher truth than that.

God made a statement on Calvary two thousand years ago. There were two signs that hung above Jesus’ head. The unbelieving world saw only one. It read “King of the Jews.” The believing eye, however, sees another: “In this is Love.”

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”*