

HOMILY

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

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The middle school music teacher had just organized a band in her school. The principal was so very proud of the music teacher's efforts that without consulting her he decided that the band should give a concert for the entire school. The music teacher wasn't so sure her young musicians were ready to give a concert. She tried to talk the principal out of holding the concert but to no avail! Just before the concert was ready to begin, as the music teacher stood on the podium, she leaned forward and whispered to her nervous musicians, "If you're not sure of your part, just pretend to play." With that, she stepped back, lifted her baton, and with a great flourish brought it down. Lo and behold, nothing happened! The band brought forth a resounding silence.

Sometimes we in the Church are like that middle school band...unsure of our parts, reluctant to trumpet forth the music of faith that God desires of us. And that's because we have trouble deciding what's most important to us. An incident a couple of summers ago in San Antonio, Texas, illustrates what I'm talking about.

It was a hot, 99-degree August day when a ten-month-old baby girl was accidentally locked in a parked car by her aunt. Frantically, the mother and the aunt ran around the auto in near hysteria while a neighbor attempted to unlock the car with a clothes hanger. The infant was bawling at the top of her lungs, beginning to turn purple, and foam at the mouth. It had quickly become a life-or-death situation when a tow-truck driver by the name of Fred Arriola arrived on the scene. He grabbed a hammer from his truck and smashed the back side window to free the baby. Was he heralded a hero? Not so, according to an article in the paper. He is quoted as saying, "The lady was mad at me because I broke the window. I just thought, 'What's more important, a baby or a window?'"

Most of the choices we make in life are not between what is trivial and what is important. Rather, most of the choices we made are usually between what is important and what is more important. Today's Gospel is so timely for us because it shows us what is most important. As Jesus says today, "*A new commandment I give you: that you should love one another. As I have loved you, so you should also love one another. This is how all will know that you are my Disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

Note, first and foremost, what God desires of us—that we love one another. We may tithe. We may teach. We may sing or serve or sacrifice. We may visit the sick, clean the kitchen, plant flowers. And all of these things are vital to the Church. They are wonderful and important to our life together. But if we do not do them out of love for God, if we do not love one another, we miss what God desires most of us.

Lucy stands with her arms folded and a resolute expression on her face while Charlie Brown pleads with her. "Lucy," he says, "you must be more loving. The world needs love. Make this world a better place, Lucy, by loving someone else." At that Lucy whirls around angrily and Charlie goes flipping over backwards. "Look, you blockhead," Lucy screams, "the world I love. It's people I can't stand!"

And I think that sometimes we can identify with that remark. It's easy to love in the abstract—the world, people in general. We have no problem with that. It's people around us that drive us crazy. And yet it is precisely those people around us, people nearest to us, with whom we work and go to school, neighbors next door, and the people we sit next to in church that Jesus calls us to love.

We live in a world that is increasingly hostile to the Christian faith, a world that grows more and more self-centered every day, a world that has lost the meaning of the word "sacrifice," that does not understand the commitment of faith. This is the world in which we are called to share God's love, but we also admit that we are part of this world. We are among those who find it difficult to love others. We are among those whose time is limited and who find it difficult to make time for the Church. We are among those who often fail to share God's love with others, whose offerings for the Church are often far from "sacrificial."

As we gather today and hear Jesus' word to us, our prayer is that God will strengthen us for service to him and help us to love one another. We pray that God would use the example of Jesus' love in action to teach us how to love as well, to show us how to give of ourselves for others, and to lift our vision to heaven above and set us afire with faith. Love for one another is the primary witness of the Church in the world today. Jesus made that clear when he said, "*By this shall all know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

Sharing God's love, living God's love, loving one another happens when we are connected to God's love, when we allow God's love to surround us, to shape and mold our lives in Jesus' image. In a world all too often filled with people concerned about themselves first, characterized with an impersonal "what's in it for me" attitude, we are called to witness something more important—love that gives of itself for others; love that cares about others; love that makes our lives meaningful and significant in giving to others. So take up your instruments and play! Let the band of faithful strike up a tune, for the musical score, the notes, are laid out before us. Jesus says, "*As I have loved you, love one another.*"