

Fifth Sunday of Easter May 2, 2010 C

WHAT WAS NEW ABOUT JESUS' NEW COMMANDMENT TO LOVE?

In today's Gospel, Jesus says: *"I give you a new commandment, love one another"* (John 13:34).

What was *new* or *different* about Jesus' new commandment to love? It was a love without limits or borders. It was unconditional and embraced *all* people without exception. It was a love willing to die for others. It was this kind of love that enabled Paul and Barnabas in today's first reading to embrace the Gentiles, the hated enemies of the Jews. Asking the Apostles to open the door to the Gentiles was like asking us to open the door to the Taliban or to anyone whom we tend to despise.

When asked what does love look like, St. Augustine responded with these words:

*"Love has hands to help others.
It has feet to hasten to the poor and needy.
It has eyes to see misery and want.
It has ears to hear the sighs and sorrows."*

Mother Teresa once wrote:

"Spread love everywhere you go, first of all in your own home. Give love to your children, your wife, your husband, to a next door neighbor... Let no one come to you without leaving them better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness. Kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting."

Five Expressions of Love

In his book the *Five Languages of Love*, Gary Chapman says that we give and receive love in different ways. We don't all have the same love language. In an article on Chapman's book, Sandra Aldrich sums up his five languages of love in the following way and adds some of her own reflections.

WORDS: Folks who have the language of words need to hear things like "I love you," "Thank you," "I'm glad you're part of our family" and "I'm so glad I married you."

GIFTS: To those who have this language, a gift says, "I was thinking of you when I saw this on my trip." Are you always buying gifts for someone else, and you don't understand why she/he never buys you gifts?

QUALITY TIME: These folks see the hours spent together as a special expression of love. When I heard this, I suddenly understood why the men in my family insist that their wives go fishing with them all day—they're quality-time people.

TOUCH: Dr. Chapman said husbands understand this one best, but feel as though their wives often say, "No touch without the words." But touch doesn't have to be limited to sex. Even our teens who are too "grown up" to be hugged will appreciate a pat on the back when we go past them.

ACTS OF SERVICE: I remember one Saturday when I was running late for a meeting at church and then discovered that my car had a flat tire. My husband, Don, insisted that I take his car so I wouldn't be late. When I pulled into our driveway two hours later, he had not only changed my tire, but he was just finishing washing and waxing my car. Boy that spoke volumes of love to me.

As you apply this idea to marriage, you need to know that people tend to express love the way they'd like to be loved. A friend of mine, Kari, spent several hours thinking up three pages of activities to offer her husband for his birthday. He wasn't impressed; he just wanted to spend a quiet day at home reading the Tom Clancy novel he'd found at a garage sale.

She was hurt because he so easily dismissed something she had put a lot of time into. She would have loved it if he had custom-made a gift like that for her. But that was the whole point; she gave something that she would have loved rather than giving him what he wanted.

It's important to understand which languages you and your spouse favor so that you can express love in the way it is most likely to be understood and so that you can "hear" your spouse's expressions of love, even though they may differ from what you are looking for.

WHAT GUYS WANT TO HEAR: We women want to talk in great detail, but our men don't want the details. Here's an example: When I go to lunch with a friend, my husband only wants to hear, "Nina and I had a great talk. Thank you for staying with the children. I really appreciate that."

Unless he asks more questions, that's all he wants to hear. Do not say, "It was wonderful. But when we got there, we had to wait a while because the waitress dropped a tray of glasses, and it took forever to sweep the mess up. But finally Nina and I got a table, but remember how I always like to order the mesquite grilled chicken sandwich? Well, they were out of chicken and then they had to substitute the sourdough bread instead of the whole wheat bread."

Not Even Alzheimer's Can Erase God

The following was written by Peter Feuerherd in a recent edition of *US Catholic*.

The lines on her face indicate that Sister Miriam is well into her 80s. But she tells a visitor that she is 40.

It isn't a concession to vanity. In her mind Sister Miriam truly is 40. Minutes later, she is a young girl, walking through the fields with two of her siblings near the Irish village where she grew up. A torrential rain ensues and she prays to God to rescue them from the coming flood. He does.

Sister Miriam—not her real name—is beginning to suffer from a form of dementia. She lives in a community for the elderly on the East Coast, a facility much like many of the institutions she helped to lead in her younger years. One of those facilities was located in a Midwest city prone to flooding, perhaps explaining her current obsession with water.

Besides her memories, Sister Miriam lives in the present. "I go through the building here three times a day," she tells her visitor. "I see if it's tidy, that everything is in order." She says she prays six times a day, "to help me to be a good person and to be very kind in every which way."

She is convinced that God is watching over this facility. Recently she encountered a depressed resident who was crying, saying that no one loved her. Sister Miriam took her hand and assured her that she was loved by an eternal God.

Sister Miriam may not, at times, make sense to some people. She may well be in her own world. Yet God is real to her, a presence who is loving yet demands a moral accounting—she often talks about God frowning

upon violent behavior. Her religious imagination is as alive as ever.

That would not be surprising to Father John Malecki, a priest of the Diocese of Albany, New York, and a psychologist who completed a doctoral dissertation on the spiritual lives of Alzheimer's patients.

Working as a chaplain at Teresian House, an Albany facility that cares for the elderly with dementia, he developed techniques to draw out the religious imagination of the patients. Most were judged to be in the middle stages of Alzheimer's. At first he found himself correcting the patients, bringing them back into present reality, an often understandable reaction among those first encountering Alzheimer's patients. But as he continued his research, he found it better to just go along with them, to follow where their imaginations led.

He found that talking about patients' feelings in regular conversation was often impossible. So he used other means. He asked them to draw images. Some drew evergreens, which in Jungian psychological terms is sometimes seen as a symbol of life everlasting. He told them symbolic stories, including one about a man and his son who worked tirelessly to dig away a mountain that blocked their view of a beautiful valley.

What did the mountain represent? A patient responded quickly: "It's like our illness that keeps us from seeing the wonderful valley. But we hope and pray and persevere that we will see that valley."

He retold other patients the story of the Prodigal Son in the gospels. One nailed the symbolism. "God loves us with no strings attached," she said. Often, said Malecki, the response to religious stories was as on target as it would be from people without Alzheimer's.

Others saw their condition as an ongoing struggle with the Almighty. "Sometimes I fight with God and, at other times, I have the picture of embracing God in love," one patient told Malecki.

Even when dementia makes people unable to articulate and sense what is happening to them, Malecki notes that the religious imagination remains.

For Catholic patients the symbols of the Mass retained their power. He found, however, that taking the residents to a liturgy in a church or chapel disoriented them, moving them away from familiar surroundings. Yet when he celebrated Mass in their rooms, they recognized the familiar symbols of the chalice and the Eucharist.

Maggie Hume of Clifton Park, New York, says that Malecki's research helped her when she was taking care of her late mother who had Alzheimer's. She found herself more willing to listen to her mother's stories by "not looking at the person with a condition, [but by looking] at the person."

Carmelite Sister Peter Lillian of Germantown, New York, who ministers to people with Alzheimer's, has also found that Catholics with the disease often connect with symbols, such as the habit she wears as a member of her religious community. She finds that when she walks the halls patients will sometimes break out in a spontaneous recitation of the rosary, drawing upon some of their earliest religious imagery.

Holy Cross Family Ministries, based in North Easton, Massachusetts, has produced a guide to the rosary for those with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. The book notes that even when patients cry out in sometimes disturbing, inarticulate ways, their religious sense remains alive. "The disease does not kill the soul," says Malecki. "The spiritual life is growing." The protective and loving God that Sister Miriam prays to remains as alive as ever.

May— Month of the Rosary

Traditionally the month of May has been called the Month of the Rosary. Those of us who grew up in the Pre-Vatican II Church most likely prayed the Rosary as a family. In his spiritual classic *True Devotion to Mary*, St. Louis de Montfort writes:

The holy Rosary is a gift come down from heaven; a great present that God gives to His most faithful servants. God is the Author of the prayers of which it is composed and of the mysteries it contains.

In his apostolic letter on the Rosary, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, the late Pope John Paul II shared with us his special love for the Rosary. He writes:

The Rosary has accompanied me in moments of joy and in moments of difficulty. To it I have entrusted any number of concerns: in it I have always found comfort. The Rosary is my favorite prayer. It is marvelous in its simplicity and its depths.

He Prayed the Rosary

One hundred years ago, a university student found himself beside a man who seemed to be a well-to-do peasant. The man was praying the rosary.

The student asked, "Sir, why do you believe in such an outdated thing? Why don't you throw your rosary out the window and use your time to study science?"

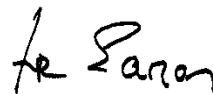
"Science? You think I do not understand science? Perhaps you can teach me."

The student said, "Sure, I'll help you, give me your name and address and I'll send you some literature."

The man fumbled in the pocket of his coat and finally found one of his cards.

Upon glancing at the card, the student bowed his head in shame and became silent. The card read: "Louis Pasteur, Director of the Institute of Scientific Research, Paris."

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Le Baron". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.