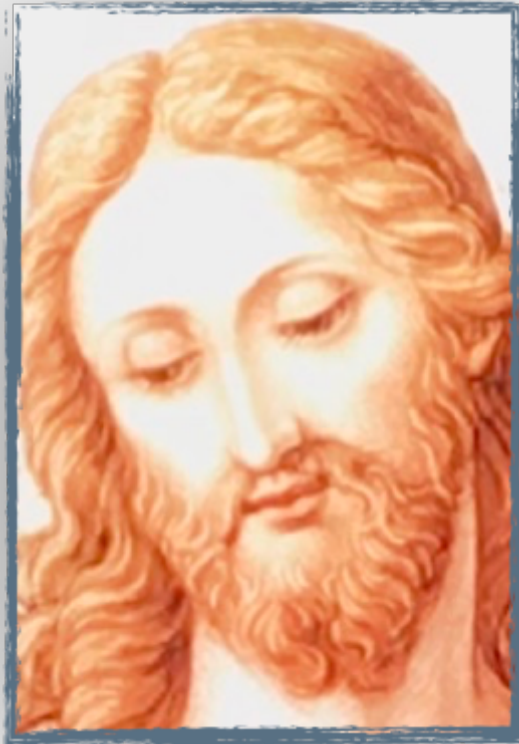


REFLECTIONS



APRIL 25, 2021

1 John 3:16-24

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

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LOVE IN ACTION

by
Norm Wright

If God is love and by that we mean God is constantly loving, constantly life-giving, and we are created in that image and are followers of our brother Jesus, who gave freely of himself in life and in death and in whom we are raised to new life, how can we say no to love?

In today's reading, John asks a relevant question we must take seriously. *"How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?"*

It is a poignant question because while God loves all, the concern here is not whether God loves those who do not return God's love but rather the concern is for those who do not make space for the type of love God has for all, the love that nurtures us and sustains all of us day by day.

I have traveled enough through the subways of New York City to observe that it is often the poor who are quickest to help the poor; that those with little are more responsive to those who have less than they. Those of us, and I include myself, who avoid looking at the face of poverty on the streets often excuse our behavior because of fear or rationalizing it as the right thing to do in order to prevent someone from using what little money we could give to enable a lifestyle of drug-use and begging off others instead of seeking a job.

I know my heart aches (condemns me) not because of their poverty but because of the poverty of my will to do what I feel is right in those situations. I have thought that when I'm in the city I need to keep dollar coins in my pocket to hand to those who need a buck or two at the moment. It wouldn't be much and I would certainly run out of coins in a very short time, but it would be something, an indication to whoever I am able to give it to that he or she is recognized as a brother or sister who is loved by God as I am loved by God.

Poverty and human need is not a big city problem. It's a problem right here in rural America. The difference is that here we don't often see it on the streets in our rural communities where the poor and the marginalized are more likely to pass us by rather than ask for help. We have good and helpful organizations in some of our communities that will assist those financially strapped; that attempt to keep people clothed, fed, and housed, but often these organizations are restricted by what finances are made available to them. I am sure that most of us give what we can to such organizations from time to time.

When we talked about God as love, we noted that God's love is nurturing and gives meaning to our lives. Love in action is more than merely meeting someone's physical needs. Merely throwing money at things might ease our consciences, but love in action requires us to do more than that. It requires that we develop friendships and build meaningful trust relationships that value all as children of God.

Churches and places of worship are best equipped or should be well-equipped to address the need to be loved and cared about; to be places of healing where people can strengthen their ability to love and care for others; places that give meaning and purpose to all of God's children.

The writer of today's lesson makes another observation worth paying attention to:

“And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him?”

As a family of faith, we must meet the face of poverty head-on in all of its forms. We must invite the impoverished and marginalized in so that each of our hearts and the heart of this parish is not condemned and found lacking in love. In that love we can, with confidence, ask God for what we need both for ourselves and for others.

As a family of faith, we must seriously ask how we can use our worldly goods to meet the needs of others. What will it take for us to brush off the alms box that has been a part of our church since the day it was built and shine a light on it? Do we budget for the needs of others, in our personal lives and in the life of our church? Are we willing to open the doors of our church home to invite the needy in, to make them feel at home, share the love of God with them, make them part of our family of faith, build them up, and nourish them in body, mind, and spirit?

It is not a question of whether we should do these things, but rather a matter of seeking the best way to put love in action.

Amen.

THE PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS

***Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.***

***O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.***

***For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.***

Amen.