

Christlike Love
 May 6, 2018
 John 15:9-17
 Easter 6

Today's Gospel continues where last Sunday's Gospel left off. Last Sunday, Jesus compared our relationship to Him with the relationship between a branch and a vine. Just as a branch cannot produce anything without the vine, so we cannot produce a productive Christian life without Jesus. So, as we hear today's Gospel, we should have in our minds that image of the special relationship that a branch has with the vine.

The Holy Spirit has grafted us into Jesus just as a gardener would graft a branch into a vine. The branch does absolutely nothing. The main vine simply incorporates the branch into itself and the branch will thrive. If the branch tries to contribute anything to the process, it will mess up the process. The branch will go into rejection and die.

As we hear more of Jesus' teaching today. We learn that the main nutrient that Jesus, the vine, feeds to us, the branches, is the nutrient of love. [Jesus said,] As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. As you might expect, this is not just any love, but it is that *ἀγάπη* style of love. You've probably heard about this special kind of love that the Greeks meant by that word *ἀγάπη*. Nevertheless, you can't really talk about love too often and today's Gospel gives us the opportunity to do just that.

One of the difficulties of the English language is that, depending on context, the English word love can have about fifty different meanings. What makes it even worse is that our culture is constantly trying to pollute the word love with twisted meanings of its own. Since next Sunday is Mother's Day, we might imagine an example of a mother demonstrating that *ἀγάπη* style of love.

Let's imagine a woman who is the mother of a daughter who is a very bright, active, and popular student at the local high school. The school year is almost over. Spring is in the air and everything feels fresh and new.

A classmate invites the daughter to a party. It sounds innocent enough until the mother learns that the parents of this classmate will be out of town during the party. The party is really the idea of this classmate's older brother who has just gotten back from the university. The mother begins to wonder if the party that this brother and his friends would throw might get kind of wild. She remembers that the house has a very nice finished basement with a well-stocked bar. This mother considers the situation for a while and decides that the party has a pretty high potential for disaster. She tells her daughter that she can't go to the party.

Well, the daughter really wanted to go and she thinks her mother is totally off base. The frustrations well up and words begin exploding out of her mouth. "You hate me!" "You never let me have any fun!" "I hate you!" "You are the stupidest mom ever!" The tirade continues for a while. Then the daughter storms off to her room, slams the door, texts her friend that her mom is a total idiot, and then cries herself to sleep. During the next few days, the tension is thick enough to cut with a knife.

The news about the party starts to filter in during the day after the party. Apparently, the neighbors had to call the police in order to keep the peace. The police arrested the older brother and some of his friends for possession of illegal drugs. Several of the partiers were arrested for drunk driving as they tried to drive home. One of the drunk drivers evaded the police and then failed to notice a red light. He and his friend died almost instantly when an eighteen wheeler broadsided their vehicle. After a few weeks, one of the daughter's friends learns that she is pregnant. Because she got high as a kite at the party, she has no idea who the father might be. Even though the mother's decision created all kinds of tension between her and her daughter, she is glad she kept her daughter home that night.

The mother in this imaginary story exhibited *ἀγάπη* love. She did what was best for her daughter even though it meant discord and tension. *Ἀγάπη* love means you will do what is best for the people in your life even if it means they will hate you for it. It means you do what is best for the people in your life no matter what.

Our culture has a whole different idea of love. Our culture as a whole is like the daughter in our little imaginary story. If any one dares to suggest that a person's behavior might be self-destructive, our culture immediately replies with labels. You are arrogant, judgmental, narrow-minded, hateful, and divisive. Never mind the very real possibility that a person might harm herself or others. The fact that you disagree with her automatically means that you hate her. Our culture seems to define love as allowing everyone to do what is right in his own eyes, even if the facts indicate that this will cause real harm.

Our culture is one more fulfillment of the words that Paul wrote to Timothy [[2 Timothy 3:1-5](#)]: "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power." Our culture not only encourages people to have these vices, but it also teaches that such vices are actually virtuous. In reality, our culture's idea of love is really a disguised form of greed.

How different God's love is for us. [[Romans 5:8](#)] God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. These words that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome teach us that God did what was best for us in spite of the fact that we hated Him. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that the love He has for us is the same love that He, as God the Son, shares with God the Father.

In today's Gospel Jesus takes *ἀγάπη* all the way when He says, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." Jesus did more than talk about laying down His life for His friends. Even while Jesus was teaching His disciples with the words of today's Gospel, Judas was on his way to the authorities. He would soon lead soldiers to Jesus in Gethsemane. There Judas would betray Jesus. The very next day, Jesus would fulfill His very own description of love with His own suffering and death on the cross. He would endure not only death, but also the anger of God at all of our sins. This is the love that saves us.

Jesus said, "Abide in my love." This is the love of the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. This is the great love that lays down life for a friend. This is the love of the Lamb of

God who takes away the sin of the world. This is the love of the God-man who stood between God and us and took the full force of the wrath of God for us. This is the love that bled on the cross and said, [Luke 23:34] "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." This is the love that rose from the dead and promises us eternal life.

Jesus said, "Abide in my love." Abide means remain; stop trying in your own power. The Holy Spirit has grafted us into Christ Jesus, the Vine, through the gift of faith. Any work we try to do to achieve our salvation only serves to reject that faith and expel us from Christ's love. Abiding in God's love means that He will work in us to strengthen our faith toward Him and He will work through us to show fervent love toward our brothers.

God loves us unconditionally. He is the only source of pure, unconditional, ἀγάπη love. It is in this love that God created us and still sustains us. It is this love that compelled the Son of God to assume a human nature and sacrifice Himself on the cross to save us from sin. It is in this love that we abide by faith. Just as God's love raised Christ from the dead, it promises that He will be with us here on this earth and that we shall be with Him forever in heaven. By faith this love works in us and through us to make us fruit-bearing branches of the Vine. Let us rejoice in that love and produce in our lives the precious fruit that pleases our heavenly Father. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.