

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter - John 13:31-35

"This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

What a powerful statement! "Love one another." Jesus practiced what he preached. Notice that this gospel passage comes right after Jesus gives communion even to Judas. "Simon Peter nodded to (John) to find out whom he meant would betray him...Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it...so (Judas) took the morsel and left at once."

Maybe Jesus was giving Judas one last chance to change his mind after receiving communion. Jesus loves even Judas that much to give him the chance...to change his mind. "Love one another as I have loved you, ***even Judas.***"

The Greek word for love that the John the Evangelist uses is "**agape**," a **divine love**, a love one is ready to die for another. "Love one another, **agape**, a divine love, as I have loved you." The difference between Jesus and Judas is that Jesus was ready to die for his disciples. Judas definitely was not. Peter loved Jesus, but as a friend, **philia**. The gospel challenges us by asking what kind of love do we love each other with?

Notice that the disciples were **commanded** not to love Jesus but to love one another! This is the only commandment in John's gospel. Jesus began the Passion by washing their feet, a symbol of his coming death on their behalf. They were to wash each other's feet, a symbol of their mutual love, a love which the only limit was death. There can be no greater love than laying down one's life for one's friends. This commandment is the subject of a **beatitude**: "If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it."

Jesus does not call it an *ideal* or a *value* or a *hope* or a *desire* but a **commandment**. No word could be stronger, more absolute, more non-negotiable. Finally, Jesus says, "To lay down one's life for one's friends." I am sure that over the centuries, the greatest debate is "Who are my **friends**?" That is like the disciples asking Jesus, who are my "**neighbors**?" Some priests want to restrict who can receive the Eucharist. Only those who receive on the tongue, only those who kneel down at the communion rail and cover their hands, only those women who cover their heads, etc. I guess that leaves out Judas. How about unconditional love, **agape**.