

Sunday, November 14, 2010

Love is the Backbone of the Church

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35) These are the words that our Lord Jesus wanted to implant in hearts of His disciples at the end of His mission on earth, so that the church becomes one heart and one spirit. Love is what keeps the unity of the church, like the nerves that connect the whole body to the head, and allow each member to feel one another.

When Christ wanted to demonstrate these words with a practical example, He knelt down before the disciples and insisted on washing their feet, and then He commanded them to wash each other's feet. This is love, and this is ministry! He also demonstrated His ultimate love to us by walking in the path of passion and the cross till death, for the sake of our salvation.

Our teacher Saint Paul, the apostle, clarified this concept when he spoke about how the members of the body should honor one another (1 Corinthians 12). The members of the body don't dispose of each other, but rather they support and complete one another so they all work together to serve one body.

Likewise is a successful church. When love flows within her members through the nourishment of the holy sacraments and spiritual teachings, everyone becomes united with one another. Love is a sign for the strength, cohesion, and maturity of a church... one heart... one spirit. This comes from partaking of communion of one body, and drinking from one Spirit.

As a consequence, the purpose of the Lord that everyone is united and steadfast in one God, would be fulfilled in us (John 17). Then, the church becomes, indeed, **the face of Christ on earth and the embassy of heaven amidst the world.**

In fact, love is not a lifeless or inert feature, but rather is it a dynamic and living one that needs nourishment; it also grows, interacts, and evolves. **The more the work of the Holy Spirit grows in one's heart, the more this heart becomes filled with love, and it becomes bigger, so it would be filled with even more love, and it becomes bigger, and so on, endlessly.** When love grows in someone's heart, its fruits start to appear in his life, this was summarized for us by Saint Paul, the apostle, when he said: *“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”* (1 Cor 13: 4-8).

It takes continuous strife and great sacrifice for these good fruits of love to appear in us. It also requires uninterrupted sustenance by the Holy Spirit who is the spirit of love, and it is He who gives us the desire, strength, and energy to love one another.

Perhaps we all know many verses about love, but we may need some guidance regarding practical love in our relationships. Let's take a look at some of them:

1. Man is the image of God... Love God who is in him.
2. Avoid thinking that there are perfect people. Keep in mind that everyone has faults and shortfalls, just focus on the positives and consider the shortfalls as a **“Prohibited Zone.”** Learn them very well, and label them with a sign that says **“Do Not Enter.”**
3. Understand your rights and your responsibilities in any relationship you establish. If you are not sure what they are, ask the other party to avoid confusion.
4. Set boundaries between yourself and others, this will help you establish a healthy and loving relationship. Keep a space between you and others depending on your closeness to them, personal compatibility, and your tolerance level.
5. If you have been upset from a person, find him an excuse... Learn how to forgive just like your Master. Do not keep anger against anyone in your heart, lest it turns to a volcano that could erupt at any time, harming you and others. Instead, pray so that you calm down and your heart becomes filled with peace. Then, find the appropriate time to admonish with love, try to use phrases such as: I understood... I felt... I expected ... Do not say: You are...You did this... You did that. Beware of hurtful words or being emotional, rather be adorned with patience and wisdom.
6. Finally, remember very well that you also make mistakes that, without you realizing, may cause aggravation to those who are around you. Forgive them first so they can forgive you. And may God forgive us all.

Fr. Yohanna Naseef
fryohanna@hotmail.com

