

## **The Many Splendors of Divine Love**

The First Sunday after Trinity

(From the Epistle: 1 St. John iv. 7 ff.)

*7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. 8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. 9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. 12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. 13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. 15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. 17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. 19 We love him, because he first loved us. 20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? 21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*

The word *love* appears in today's Epistle excerpt no less than 28 times! This scripture is truly saturated with love.

Since the word is so wildly popular and in such widespread use among so many circumstances today, it is important that we understand how God's Word makes use of it, because that's where we will find the truth about love. We will leave behind cliché and superficiality. We will also go beyond sentimentality and romance. It's not that these don't have their place. They always have, and always will. But all things virtuous and beautiful are under fire today. And in some very real and tragic ways, those institutions meant to be the sacred guardians of love, whether marriage, the family, and even the church, have suffered the worst damage. When a wicked world can hold up for all to view the vestiges of these institutions and proclaim loudly and smugly, "Look! Look what's happened to your so-called unassailable pillars of a just and healthy society!" Divorce is no longer "d-i-v-o-r-c-e" as a country song put it, spelled out letter by letter so that the poor children who will have to suffer its consequences won't understand what Mommy and Daddy are contemplating. Why, now it's a common part of the kids' vocabulary! The sacred altar of marriage is so disparaged that its access today is sought for the sanctioning of the most sordid behavior, and the justifying word spread over it, forbidding any and all opposition to such "marriages", is "love". And those who rightfully witness against the church because of its incomprehensible divisions that seem to speak far more of the nature of man than that of God, question the reality of the love that the church preaches.

Thank God that when we enter the world of Holy Scripture, we leave the uncertain, ever changing world of man who writes his own definitions only to rewrite them according to the whim of the times, for the permanent, fixed, abiding truth of God's own Word upon which we can utterly depend. The Epistle will allow us to draw conclusions about *love* that will serve to carry us safely through life in this world until the very end of all things.

Today's passage doesn't spell out the practical duties of love. Those are found abundantly elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 13; Romans 13; Matthew 5:43 ff., 1 Peter 3:8-11, etc.), and earlier in 1 John the Apostle exhorts us: *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.* But it does offer us some very unusual keys to a strong faith that are based exclusively on love. Today we will look at three of these.

*Loving one another*, says John, is evidence to our claim both of spiritual rebirth and knowledge of God: *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.* Everything that exists is identifiable by its fulfillment of its function. Bees collect honey. Trees blossom and produce fruit. The sun is the main mechanism set in place to maintain this life-supporting, physical planet. And onward it goes. Christians *love*, and just for emphasis, the apostle states the converse: *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.* Because *God is love*, all He does is *love*, and it can be no different for us, as His children who have been *born of Him*. Does this sound like an impossible ideal? It would be, were it not so that all of the power of God in our lives is directed to this end, and that His entire purpose is to make sure, at all costs, that this very thing comes to pass in each and every one of us. His love will indeed be *perfected in us*. God is relentless about such things!

Note also the almost out of place insertion of the phrase: *No man hath seen God at any time.* This is a humbling reminder to mortal man: God is simply too great and powerful to behold, in His entirety. But since the Son at the Ascension has returned to live with the Father, and we can no longer behold God in the flesh, He will only be seen *dwelling in us*, as we *love one another*. This implies immense responsibility.

Added to these outcomes of love is *boldness in the day of judgment*. This, too, is a phrase that seems to come out of nowhere. Why would *the day of judgment* be discussed here within the context of love? On human terms, to the extent that we conform with the laws of the land, we have the least conflict with those who both administer the law and those who hold us accountable for obeying it. The picture of the "law abiding citizen" is one who rests contentedly within the bounds of what is legally and rightfully mandated. In so going, he avoids running up against the prohibitions that society has established for its own protection. As obvious as these things are, or at least should be, on the earthly level, they are far less so when it comes to answering to God.

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments...* (Ps. 111:10). We do indeed live in times when the fear of the Lord is a rare thing indeed. People are concerned neither for the immediate nor eventual consequences of their decisions or actions. The *day of judgment* is as remote a thought as some forgotten historical fact that no one is interested in any more. This is indeed the most dangerous of all possible states of mind. To assume that no human actions or decisions, whether collective, in the form of those which cultures and societies and even entire ages make, or merely individual, which may appear to affect no one other than myself, will bear no consequence other than that which either their success or failure has caused, is the greatest of self-deceptions.

*And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away ; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened : and another book was opened , which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.* (Rev. 20:11, 12)

*Boldness in the day of judgment!* This is no small possession, and it is promised only to those who, through obedience to the commandment to love, have so thoroughly identified themselves with the One who is *is love* (1 John 4:8), that they have served to practically eliminate the basis of the greatest of all fears, that of divine condemnation. The only way not to fear judgment is to live as close to the Judge as possible. He will surely not condemn that of Himself which He sees residing in us. In an earlier passage in this same letter we read:

*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.* (1 John 3:1-3)

O, most wonderful of promises!

Lastly, love is the remedy of fear: *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment . He that feareth is not made perfect in love.* Fear, in spite of any boasts to the contrary, is a universal motivator among us that neither sophistication, nor science, nor electronic devices, nor departments of defense, or any other means have managed to control. Curiously, it is perhaps far more universal today, if not acknowledged or admitted, than in previous times when circumstances made men generally much more vulnerable to dangers. It wells up within us in spite of the best and most popular of assurances against it. It is largely the province of uneasy consciences: *The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him...*(Prov. 10:24), and in an age of iniquity, it lies carefully repressed just below the surface in all the hearts and institutions of men. But a heart bent on obeying God's mandate to *love* alone can truly proclaim the popular slogan "No fear!". Such a one is at ease, not only because he is working to please the only One

he truly should fear, but also because he knows that he himself is perfectly loved by God, His heavenly Father, who will preserve his soul in trouble, sorrow, sickness, and even death:

*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear ? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid ? (Psalm 27:1)*

Today we have focused on three fruits of divine love: it is the chief identifying factor of our claim to heavenly citizenship; it is the key to confidence on that Day when we each and all will stand before the great and awesome throne of the Judgment of God; and it is the sure remedy for fear, because it settles our consciences, fills us with assurance, and declares peace between us and the only One in heaven and on earth whom we really *should* fear!

But a commandment can either be obeyed or it can be ignored. And only once, or even a few times, is not enough. It is a life's work.

Help us, Lord, to live up to these truths!

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*