



Bringing Home the Word



Fifth Sunday of Easter

April 24, 2016

An Illustration of Love

By Janel Esker

Our refrigerator is covered with a panoply of family photos and children's artwork. Usually the artwork stays for a while and then is replaced by newer creations, but one piece has stood the test of time: a homemade valentine from our then-five-year-old niece Lucia. It's a sweet pink-and-red heart, and in the center is written "I love you?"—the *pièce-de-résistance* being the question mark. I'm pretty certain Lucia didn't intend to question her love for us, but the thought

of that valentine in which she ponders her love always makes me smile.

Love is on Jesus' mind in today's Gospel, but it's definitely not set in the form of a question. In fact, it's a command: "Love one another." Even more challenging are his next words: "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." He said it as he was about to show the depth of that love on the cross. He loved completely, self-sacrificially, pouring out the fullness of his life—no questions asked.

To "love one another" is one thing. To love as Jesus loved is quite another. If we're honest, our valentines may indeed ask, "I love you?"—that is, if we're measuring our love against the standard Jesus set.

Think about all those we are commanded to love—those easy to love and those more difficult to love. How can we deepen that love into self-sacrifice? How can we break down our resistances and love more fully? †

Sunday Readings

Acts 14:21–27

"It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."

Revelation 21:1–5a

"I, John, saw a new heaven and a new earth....I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem."

John 13:31–33a, 34–35

"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."

A Word From Pope Francis

If **laying down one's life** for one's friends is the greatest proof of love (see John 15:13), Jesus offered his own life for all, even for his enemies, to transform their hearts. This explains why the evangelists could see the hour of Christ's crucifixion as the culmination of the gaze of faith; in that hour the depth and breadth of God's love shone forth.... This love, which did not recoil before death in order to show its depth, is something I can believe in; Christ's total self-gift overcomes every suspicion and enables me to entrust myself to him completely.



—*Lumen Fidei*, 16

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How can I love as Jesus loved: without question?
- What attitudes and behaviors do I need to change in my life?

Our Mother of Perpetual Help: The Icon of Love

By Br. Daniel Korn, CSsR

No other image offers us more possibility of meditation on the heart of the Gospel message than the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. This icon is truly the Gospel in image form. We approach the icon in a spirit of faith and humility, and our faith enables us to uncover the hidden messages contained within in the image.

The Greeks have a word for the type of icon we have in the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, *Hodegetria*, which means, “one who shows the way.” This perfectly describes Mary’s role in revealing to us the Gospel message. She stands before us looking intently out to those in front of her with her right hand pointing toward the Child she is holding. Mary, in this icon, is teacher and evangelist. She is a way into the mystery of Christ. The Church teaches us that Mary’s mission is that of leading others to Christ, and in the icon we encounter Mary as the way, the sign that proclaims the mystery of Christ to the world.

The icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help presents no written words but rather speaks to us through signs and symbols. We use the



method called the prayer of gazing to unpack the message contained within these symbols.

The whole image of Our Mother of Perpetual Help is about Jesus Christ and Mary’s role as his Mother. When we look at the icon, we are invited to read what is contained in the image. We are invited to read the icon as we would read a page in Scripture. This reading of the icon leads us into an experience of Mary that deepens our devotion to her. Through reading the signs and symbols presented in the icon, we are led into a deeper experience of God...

When you pray with icons of Mary, open your Bible to the Gospel of Luke. Gently place your hands on the written word and slowly allow your eyes to gaze on the icon. Do a simple, quiet reading of the icon, and then slowly close your eyes and become aware of the silence that surrounds you. Rest in this silence, letting distractions fade away. Stay in this silence for as long as you want.

When you wish to return to your current milieu, slowly open your eyes. As you return your gaze to the icon, read a passage from Luke. End the experience by gently reciting a Hail Mary.

Icons are more than religious art; they are passages into the world of mystery. In the many icons of Mary, we are influenced by her virtues and attitudes. We feel Mary’s spirit—her faithfulness, her humility, and her pondering of the mysteries of God. †

From *Embracing the Icon of Love*, © 2015 Liguori Publications.

Celebrations

On June 27, 2016, Redemptorists worldwide will celebrate the 150th anniversary of Pope Pius IX entrusting the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help to the Redemptorists, with the mission to “make her known.” Events, missions, retreats, celebrations and much more will be occurring across the globe. Learn more at IconOfLove.org, the official site of the jubilee celebration.



Risen Lord, you command us to love as you have loved. Cleanse my heart of pride, selfishness, and prejudice so that I may love unconditionally.

—From *Hopeful Meditations for Every Day of Easter Through Pentecost*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 25–30

Mon. St. Mark:
1 Peter 5:5b–14 / Mark 16:15–20

Tue. Easter Weekday:
Acts 14:19–28 / John 14:27–31a

Wed. Easter Weekday:
Acts 15:1–6 / John 15:1–8

Thu. Easter Weekday:
Acts 15:7–21 / John 15:9–11

Fri. St. Catherine of Siena:
Acts 15:22–31 / John 15:12–17

Sat. Easter Weekday:
Acts 16:1–10 / John 15:18–21