

God made us so that we fall in love. It is part of our nature to want to share our lives with another whom we love.

At some point and time in a relationship forged in love, one or both of the parties have this thought, “how can this other person love me? I have faults. I have character flaws. I’m not the most handsome or beautiful person around. I’m certainly not the most talented or successful. How can they love me when I’m like...this?” And the simple and less than profound answer one usually hears is, “I don’t know. I just do. I just love you.”

People who love us know our faults and flaws. They know that we don’t possess movie star good looks or are successful like the world’s billionaires. Nevertheless, there is another out there who just loves us – not for what we have or possess. But they love us for who we are.

In the first line of my Pastor’s Column in the bulletin this week I state that we cannot earn God’s love. There are no amount of Masses we attend or good works we perform which will capture God’s attention to the point where he will say, “oh, because of this or that, now I love you.”

God’s love is never conditional. God’s love is never half-hearted. God’s love can never be turned off like a faucet. Rather, God’s love is like an endless spring that bubbles up from the depths of the earth to refresh, renew, and revive all people – regardless of their state or status in life.

So why do we go to Mass? Why do we confess our sins and repent from our sinful ways? Why do we engage in acts of goodness, mercy, and justice for others? We do these things because they are what connect us to the font of God's love which knows no end.

Examples of God's boundless and indiscriminate love is found in our first reading and in today's gospel. The first reading is taken from the end of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

Throughout that book, Isaiah is addressing a people who have sinned. They have been displaced from their homeland because of their sinful choices. They have aligned themselves with pagan idols and adopted practices which are polar opposite to the Jewish way of life. Isaiah reminds the Jews to turn back to God and his ways. In doing so, they can once again experience the life-giving love of God. The prophet uses wonderful imagery to that effect. The imagery includes receiving food and drink without having to pay anything for it. He goes further by saying this is what will lead to abundant life. Despite their sin and their abandonment of God, God doesn't give up on his people. He nourishes them. He fills them with life. They only need to open their lives to God's love and grace which constantly flows from his heart to anyone who desires it.

That same theme is also found in the gospel. Today's passage begins with Jesus being told that his cousin John the Baptist was murdered. As happens with many of us when we receive overwhelmingly bad news, we retreat inward and need time to reflect on and be healed of that trauma. But as Jesus encounters those in need around him, he reacts as only God can. Rather than turning inward, Jesus turns outward – healing those in need and

feeding those who are hungry. He shows the immensity of his love by taking just a handful of food and miraculously providing more than enough food for the large gathering assembled before him. Note that there are even leftovers for them to take for the journey ahead.

I hope its obvious to you the language that is used to describe what Jesus did during this event. Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples so that they could distribute this abundance food to the crowd. Those same words are used at every Mass. At Mass, it is Jesus who takes the bread from the altar, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to be distributed to the crowd assembled here. As a sign that his love and generosity are never exhausted, he does the same at each and every Mass. What's more, Jesus never tires of sharing himself in love with us. This meal will be repeated again and again as a sign that God's love and generosity are never-ending.

The only thing Jesus asks in return is that we share what we have become and what we have received with others. We have been commissioned to be Christ for others and are to love those we encounter like Christ.

Many in this world live out the adage “an eye for an eye.” Someone hurts us, we hurt them in return. They hit us, we hit them even harder. That might be the way people around us live today, but it is not the way of living that Jesus models for us. In a world where hatred, retribution, and a scorched-earth policy seems acceptable, someone is called to model the love of Christ as a counter measure. You and I are that “someone.” Loving others like this is a reflection of how Christ's loves us. Loving

like this isn't something another earns. Loving like this isn't easy and may even set us up to be taken advantage of or worse. But loving like this is what leads to eternal life with Christ.

As we partake in this banquet of love today, may we recommit to living and loving like Christ – as best and as often as we can, even if our love is imperfect and falls short. As St. Paul tells us in his First Letter to the Corinthians, “there are three things that last – faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.” (*I Cor. 13: 13*) Let us love greatly, boldly, and for all our days. Living like that is the way we dwell in God and God dwells in us.