



Fr. J. Patrick Foley

Itinerant Papist Preacher

Retreat Ministry • Parish Missions

"Come away by yourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile!..." Mark 6:31
Are you ready to accept the invitation?

“Love – and then do as you will.”

18 May 2017 – Thursday of the Fifth Week of Easter

Love, and then do as you will? Doesn't that sound rather dangerous? Perhaps. But it is taken from the writings of St. Augustine, considered one of the greatest teachers of the faith in the early church. And he is simply stating in different words what Jesus is telling us in the passages from John's Gospel that we are hearing these Easter days (*ch. 13-16*).

Love – and then do as you will. Frankly, it would be so much easier to stick to the Ten Commandments. At least then, I can know exactly where I stand. It's so much simpler to keep score as I examine my conscience, acknowledging two – all right, three of these, two of those, none of those (God forbid!). But when can I ever say that I am always a loving person? Even to think the thought is enough to make me laugh! If I say it aloud, many others would also laugh – they know better!

Love is always an ideal to which I can aspire; it is never a goal which I can someday achieve. Like any genuine ideal, it always calls me further, always calls me to deeper and more authentic love, and to the source of all love, who is God.

The meeting known as the “Council of Jerusalem” described in today's first reading (*Acts 15:7-21*) tells of the challenges that go along with trying to be a loving community. The issue in those early days of Christianity was a very critical one: Must non-Jews first convert to Judaism before they could be Christians? The underlying issue was even more critical: Will Christianity be another sub-group of Judaism (analogous to Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, etc.), or will it be completely separate? Yes, more critical and more deeply personal, since all of the first followers of Jesus, and therefore all of the first Christians, were themselves Jewish. Did following Jesus mean abandoning their Jewish identity?

The story suggests that the issue was hotly debated, and could have torn the young community apart. Why did it not? Because they were striving to be a community of love, which demanded deep listening to, and deep respect for those of other convictions. I'm sure it was not at all easy; but finally the Spirit led the community to decide for openness, welcome and equality. Imagine if it had gone the other way! Imagine too if those same qualities guided even the hotly contested issues of our communities, our nation, and our church.

Fr. J. Patrick Foley, Ph.D.