

Fifth Sunday of Transfiguration – Agape Love

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian
St. Sarkis Armenian Church. Carrollton, TX
July 31, 2016
Gospel Reading: John 3:13-21*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today's Gospel reading is a familiar one to all of us. It is St. John the Evangelist's narrative concerning Christ and why He was sent to earth.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever should believe in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

This passage, which every Christian has heard, speaks of God's love for mankind and the great length He went, to give us eternal life. However, the key word in this passage is “love”. In order to fully understand what this passage means, we need to first understand what love is.

Love is one of the most over-used words in English today. We use the same word/feeling for friends, family and even food. Yet, this was not the case for the ancient Greeks, especially for St. John the Evangelist when we wrote the Gospel. In Greek there are four words for love – four different types of love.

The first is called Storge (*storgē*, Greek: *στοργή*) and this love is used for relatives and things we like.

The second is called Philia (*philia*, Greek: *φιλία*) which is the love between friends. This is where the city name, Philadelphia comes from, which means “City of Brotherly Love”.

The third is called Eros (*erōs*, Greek: *ἔρως*) which is used for husbands and wives. This is more of a sexual love, where we get the word, “erotic”.

And the fourth love is called Agape (*agapē*, Greek: *ἀγάπη*) which is often referred to as divine love or parental love. This is a love which does not require or expect anything in return, but is given purely out of love. The first three loves expect something in return. It could be pleasure, relationship, assistance, guidance, help, money, or something else, but something is expected in return. Yet, the fourth love, agape love, requires absolutely nothing.

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The love that St. John the Evangelist uses in today's Gospel reading is agape love. He uses this love to demonstrate that God's love for mankind is like a parent's love for a child. It is without boundaries and expects nothing in return for that love. There is nothing that God needs from us, because He is the creator of everything – He has everything. The only thing that God asks of us is that we practice the same agape love to each other.

We are called to love and serve one another without expecting anything in return. We are called to love and serve, not only the ones that love us, but also the ones whom we do not know. This is why Christ admonishes us, by saying,

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.” (Luke 6:32-35).

It is difficult to do these things because our pride and self-interests get in the way. We naturally approach those from whom we can receive and gain things. Even in the church, there are times when we cater to those whom we think can help the church and conveniently ignore those whom we think cannot help. This is not what God calls us to do. Rather, we must show agape love to all, no matter who they are, what they have or what they can or cannot give.

Let us leave today, showing agape love to everyone we come in contact with, because only then will we truly be able to inherit the everlasting life that St. John the Evangelist mentions in today's Gospel and the everlasting life that has been promised us by Christ Himself.

Amen.