

In July 1967 the Beatles released a song that was going to be their 10th number 1 chart hit, the song was called All you need is love, the word love appears more than 60 times in the song giving us a clue as to the theme. In today's scripture the word love appears 20 times also giving us a clue as to the theme. The problem is that this four letter word can mean different things and can be used in very different contexts. C.S. Lewis a very influential Christian writer of the last century wrote a short book called "The Four Loves" in which he describes four different ways of loving, ranging from 'eros', the physical attraction which draws two young people together, to 'agape' which reaches out to others and expects nothing in return. Agape is the love God has for the whole of creation.

St John in the 2nd reading reminds us of something we would do well to dwell on. He writes, *"this is the love I mean, not our love for God, but God's love for us."* In other words before ever any of us can love we are loved by God. God has made an everlasting decision to love us, God's love is not an issue, not a matter of speculation, we can't earn it and we can't lose it, even when we don't respond in a loving way. It is God's love for us that enables us to love God and to love each other. God's love for each of us is unique, unconditional and eternal. God does not stop loving us. This is hard for us to accept because it is not always our human experience. We can and do fall in and out of love. We can and do make friends and lose friends, we can and do hurt and get hurt to such an extent that we find it difficult, sometimes almost impossible to forgive. We can and do stop loving, but God never does.

God's love is based on choice, and the supreme example of this is seen in Jesus who tells us that we can have no greater love than to lay down our lives for our friends. It is only five weeks ago that we celebrated Jesus' own laying down of his life in his passion and death on the cross. His love took him to the cross, in everything he did Jesus kept on choosing to love, to give himself until there is nothing left to give, and in his self emptying he is raised up by the Father.

This self giving/emptying quality of divine love is also seen in the lives of many people. The sacrifice parents, grandparents make for their children; the care children give to their parents in old age; the dedication people have for the sick; siblings taking siblings who are no longer able to look after themselves into their homes; the service people give to others in the community; the hours, often unseen and unknown, of simply being with another who is vulnerable or afraid or simply alone. Wherever and whenever there is self giving and a concentration on the needs of others, then something of the quality of God's love is reflected in our own lives. It is as though our own hearts expand and transformation takes place. As a line of one of the hymns tells us, "the love I have for you, my Lord, is only a shadow of your love for me." And it is God's love for us that helps us to put into practice, all be it in different ways and at different times, Jesus' words in today's Gospel – "love one another, as I have loved you", and, "you can have no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends."

Bidding Prayers for the 6th Sunday of Easter 2021

Celebrant:

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us that the Father will give us anything we ask him in his name and so with confidence we turn to the Father in prayer.

Reader:

For the Church – that it will be a place of welcome where everyone will experience God's love and be encouraged to reach out in love to others, especially those in most need.

Lord hear us

For political leaders – that they will be selfless in serving those who elected them to office and do all they can to overcome division, hatred and prejudice so that all people may live in peace.

Lord hear us

For our families – that they may be places of love where all members are respected, those with disabilities cared for and where parents and children grow in love for each other.

Lord hear us

For those who are ill, especially those who are losing control of their bodies or minds – that they and those who care for them will receive the love and support they need at this time.

Lord hear us

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the COVID-19 pandemic and Frederick Isaac Cox whose anniversary occurs this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord hear us

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Heavenly Father, your Son showed us the meaning of selfless love by laying down his life for all human-kind. May we imitate his example by loving without counting the cost. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen