

Second our Gospel text suggests that we express our love for Christ by loving Jesus more than anyone or anything else. What if your spouse asked you to choose between Jesus and her/him? What if you had to choose between Jesus and your life. What if you had to choose between the Jesus and the life of your son or daughter? Remember Jesus' words:

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.”

But let's take it down a notch. The church is the body of Christ. We meet Jesus in the Church. We commune with Jesus in the Church. What if you had to choose between going to a sports event and attending church? What if you had to choose between sleep and attending church. What if you had to choose between buying a new i-phone or HDTV and giving 10% of your income to the church? What do we really love? If we love Christ as we should, we would choose Him over everything and everyone else.

Finally we demonstrate our love for God for Christ by loving others: again St. John writes:

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. . . . If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1 John 4)

When we hate someone, or have heated, emotional arguments with someone, when we don't like someone, we demonstrate not only that we do not love our neighbors but also that we do not really love God. If we really love Christ, we will love our neighbor.

Conclusion

If you and I are honest today, we would have to say that our love for Jesus is really very small. We would have to admit that we are in no way worthy of Jesus. We frequently deny Him before men and we do not love Him more than anyone or anything else, and we do not love others as we should. We claim that the Orthodox church is the church of the martyrs and of the Saints—we claim to be members of this church, to be the children of the martyrs and the saints. And yet are we really like our parents. Do we love Jesus like they did? An Orthodox parish will never be strong and healthy unless its members honestly love Jesus more than anyone or anything else, and openly acknowledge Him before men. The first step is to acknowledge our weakness and our failure to love as we should—to repent of our selfishness and arrogance and to turn to Jesus to forgive us, to save us and to experience God's love for us. My prayer for every member of All Saints Church and for myself is that someday each of us will answer the question posed at the beginning of this homily: “How do I love Thee, Lord?” with the very public answer “With all my heart, mind, and soul, and with all my strength!” and then prove that love by our unconditional love for each other and for all mankind. **Amen!**

How Do I Love Thee



“An Orthodox parish will never be strong and healthy unless its members honestly love Jesus more than anyone or anything else, and openly acknowledge Him before men.”

Homily given at All Saints Orthodox Church on All Saints Sunday, 2010 by Fr. Nicholas Sorensen

† **Matthew 10:32, 33, 37, 38; 19:27–30**

The Lord said to His disciples, “Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father Who is in heaven; but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father Who is in heaven. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.” Then Peter said in reply, “Lo, we have left everything and followed Thee. What then shall we have?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the New World, when the Son of Man shall sit on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My Name’s sake, will receive a hundred fold, and inherit eternal life. But many that are first will be last, and the last first.”

Introduction

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote these words about her beloved husband: “**How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. / I love thee to the depth and breadth and height / My soul can reach.**” The question that I want to ask each of us this morning is How do we love Jesus?

This is also All Saints Sunday—our Parish Feast Day—the day on which we celebrate, remember, and thank God for all the Saints who have lived before us and for God’s great blessings upon our parish for these past 18 years. The saints are great examples of what it means to be loved by Christ and to love Him in return. Furthermore, All Saints parish could not exist without the love of Christ and without the love of His children who have worshipped in this place over the years. So it is appropriate this morning that we consider what it means to love God, and once again commit ourselves to knowing and practicing this divine love.

Why Should We Love Jesus

The first things that we need to consider are the reasons why we should love Jesus. Probably the least satisfying answer to that question is that we are commanded to love God. Jesus summarized the Old Testament Law with these words:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself.” (Mark 12:30)

If we are obedient to God then we will love Him. However, this immediately suggests something about the nature of love. The love that is meant here could not be exclusively an emotional love. We cannot turn emotions on or off. It would be difficult to see how we could be obedient to a command to love if love were simply understood as an emotion. The love that we are commanded to have toward God should be understood not as an emotion, although emotion is not absolutely excluded, but rather as a voluntary commitment, absolute devotion, and sacrificial action—all of which are compatible with the concept of obedience. Another answer to the question why we should love Jesus is that without that love we are nothing. St. Paul made this rather startling observation in his letter to the Corinthians:

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1-3)

The love that St. Paul is referring to here is both the love for God and the love for our neighbor—it is the divine love called Agape. This is the same love to which Jesus was referring but in this case the reason to love Christ/God is not just because it is commanded, but rather because without that love, our thoughts, our words, our deeds, and our very existence is meaningless.

However, the most important reason why we should love God is that God loves us. St. John the Theologian wrote these words:

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. . . We love, because He first loved us. (1 John 4)

The primary and most wonderful reason why we should love God, love Christ, is that He loves us with a love that is boundless, eternal, and sacrificial. St. John wrote again:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

God’s love for us was demonstrated by His Incarnation, His Suffering, His Death, His Resurrection, and His Ascension into Heaven for us. Christ’s love for us was a love that had no strings attached, a love that freely offered the ultimate sacrifice for the beloved. And Christ’s love for us still remains and will remain for all eternity. Just like the saints of old, how could we do anything else but love Him who loved us so much?

How is Our Love For Jesus Expressed

We should love Christ, because it is commanded, it gives us meaning, and most of all because He loves us. But we still need to answer the question, “how do we love Thee?” How do we love God—Christ?

Our Gospel text suggests that one way is by being willing to acknowledge Jesus before men. In other words, if we really love Christ we will not try to hide that love. So we need to ask ourselves these questions: Do people know that I am an Orthodox Christian? Do they know that I love Christ and that I am a follower of Him or do I try to hide my Christian identity? Do my co-workers or my classmates know that I am a Christian by my speech and behavior? Does my marriage demonstrate that I love Christ or does it demonstrate that I really only love myself? Does my social behavior demonstrate that I love Christ, or I am just like the rest of the world? When I am on vacation, would anyone know that I am an Orthodox Christian by my actions and words? If we love Christ, we will acknowledge Him before men.