

Children

Who knows what love is? *(response)* Ok, what is love? *(response)* Now I suppose that your mom's love you...they do don't they? *(response)* How does your mom love you? What does she do for you? *(response)* Those are all very good ways that mom's show their love. Now let me ask you a different question. Do you love your mom? *(response)* How do you show your love to your mom? What do you do for her? *(response)* Those are all very good ways to show your love for mom. Who knows what last Sunday was? *(response)* It was Mother's Day! Did you do anything special to tell mom how much you appreciate her? *(response)* Maybe make today special for her as a surprise. If she tells you to do something, say, "Yes. Mom or Mommy" and then do it/

Listen to something Jesus said; he said, "If you love me, you will obey me." What did Jesus mean: If you love me, you will obey me? *(response)* He was telling us that the best way to show our love for God is to obey him and do what he tells us to do. This is also the best way to show our love for Mom and Dad. We need to do what they tell us to do. If she tells you to sit up and eat your lunch then you need to sit up and eat your lunch. If he tells you to pick up your toys then what do you need to do? *(response)* That's right. If she tells you to be polite and say excuse me, then what are going to do? *(response)* The best way to show your parents your love is by being obedient and doing what you are asked to do. Then they will know how much you love and care for them.

Adult

A poll taken by the Center for the Governance of Change in the United Kingdom revealed that 25% of European citizens believe that robots and artificial intelligence algorithms would do a better job of making policy decisions than politicians would. [I'm tempted to throw in my two cents worth, but I will refrain], especially as we are getting our mail in ballots for the primary.

In Germany and the Netherlands, the figures are even higher. According to this poll, citizens throughout Europe are so disillusioned by their political leaders that they believe robots and computers would do a better job of governing their countries than humans would. (1)

That is a sad commentary on our lack of trust in leaders. When did we become so cynical? I personally am not quite ready to trust a robot or an artificial intelligence program to make policy decisions that decide our laws and regulations and how we run our society. After all who is going to program them Nancy Pelosi or Donald Trump?

And if you think robot politicians are a little bit scary, then what about robot religious leaders? According to recent news stories Buddhist, Hindu and Protestant Christian communities in Japan, China, India and Germany are now experimenting with robot priests who can provide pre-programmed blessings and even deliver sermons or perform funeral rites. And they don't have to wear masks. Because they will never know what it is like to be sick. They will be programmed with pious platitudes to say to sick because they can never be empathetic

What are the benefits of having a robot spiritual guide? Some people say that they won't have the biases of human beings. They can learn and update their software, so that they can improve their interactions with humans. A Buddhist temple steward in China had this to say about the robot priest who presided over his temple services, "This robot will never die; it will just keep updating itself and evolving. With (artificial intelligence), we hope it will grow in wisdom to help people overcome even the most difficult troubles." (2)

Interesting. A spiritual leader that will keep updating itself and evolving and never die—does anyone see a problem with that? Well, I do. Artificial intelligence may be able to evolve, but it will never know the power of the Holy Spirit guiding it. It may be able to update itself, but it will never have the Spirit of truth living inside of it. And a spiritual leader who never faces his or her own death can't offer us an example of wisdom, grace or courage when we wrestle with the meaning of life. How do you live fully and faithfully in the limited time you have on this earth? Think of the witness of John Paul II. Can a software program relate to the internal struggles of facing your own mortality?

In our passage today, Jesus knows that he is heading toward his death. He needs his disciples to express exactly how much they trust his leadership. What will they remember of his message and his mission after he is gone? What is the one thing his disciples will need to carry on his work and transform the world?

Jesus had a good reason to ask this question. In chapter 13, the passage leading up to this one, Jesus had knelt down like the lowliest servant and washed his disciples' feet. I'd say these men were in shock, humbled, confused by his actions. But we only know for sure how Simon Peter and Judas felt. Simon objected and tried to stop Jesus. And Judas Iscariot simply left the group. He never returned to the disciples' fold.

We can profess our love all day long—but how do we prove it? Judas had lived with Jesus and eaten with him and ministered with him for three years. He had all the marks of someone who loved Jesus. But, in the end, he betrayed the Master.

When you're in leadership, it's difficult to know whom to trust. People may follow you because they are drawn to your energy, or your popularity, or your vision. But leaders know that just because someone follows you, it doesn't mean they love you. It doesn't mean they will carry on your work when you're not there. How do you tell the difference?

This was Jesus' last major rallying cry before his arrest and crucifixion. He needed to know which of his disciples would tough it out and follow his example, and which ones would give up and walk away. Which ones would fall on their sword for him and which ones would fall to pieces.

And that's a question we have to answer in the church today. It's so easy to be a Christian in our culture. We don't face significant persecution or risk by declaring our faith. Of course this is not the first time Churches were closed. Depending upon your diocese during the Spanish flu Catholic churches were closed from two to five months. Local newspapers printed the sermons from the local Churches and some Catholics received communion without Mass, which may have contributed to three Irish priests in the state of Washington in the same rectory of dying. So when the doors are opened: There are churches in every community in our nation. There are Christian television stations and radio stations and Christian movie streaming services and we have Channel 6 here, where some can't even push 6 on the tv to catch Mass. Celebrities give interviews on their faith in Jesus. Just about every major presidential candidate claims to be a Christian, or at least to respect Christian values. Christians in our culture look and act just like everybody else. So how do you tell the difference?

Jesus said the difference is found in this: "If you love me, keep my commands." That's easy enough. If we love Jesus, we keep his commands. So if we don't keep his commands, no amount of Christian t-shirts and Christian podcasts and soul-searching small group discussions will help. If we love him, we will keep his commands.

So what are Jesus' commands? We could look at the very first command Jesus made in the book of John 1: 43 when he told Philip, "Follow me." Or we could look at his last command in John 21: 22, when he told Peter, "You must follow me." But in between these first and last chapters, Jesus gave a crystal-clear command that was at the very heart of his ministry 2,000 years ago and is still the heart of his ministry to this very day. It's in John 13: 34-35: **"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."**

It's interesting what Jesus left out here. He didn't command the disciples to be eloquent preachers or skilled leaders or courageous witnesses to an unbelieving society. He commanded them to love one another just as he had loved them. A commandment, coming from God in the flesh, is non-negotiable. It's not what Jesus wished for us or recommended for us. It's what he commanded us to do.

Actually, every one of God's commands is a challenge to us, but it's also a gift to us. God's commands protect us from harm and provide order and justice in human relationships. So we can hear the word "command" as a burden or a challenge, or we can hear it as a gift. And I think that's what Jesus intended with his new commandment. Loving like Jesus loves is the central requirement for discipleship because it gives our life purpose, it requires a sacrifice, and it changes lives.

Loving like Jesus gives our life purpose. In this sense, Jesus' command is a gift. How many of us know people who are never satisfied, who are always chasing after some accomplishment or milestone that will give them a sense of purpose? It's exhausting and frustrating to build your life around titles or accomplishments or image.

When you base your life's purpose on external values or achievements, then you are always living with a divided mind. Nothing is ever good enough. You never know when you have fulfilled your purpose. Jesus gave us a gift when he took this conflict away from us.

When Jesus commanded us to love one another as he loved us, he was removing our own agenda and priorities and replacing them with his own. The moment you accept Jesus, your life purpose becomes loving others like Jesus did. No title or accomplishment can provide the joy and satisfaction of putting love into action on behalf of others.

When Roger was in junior high his parents divorced and he moved to Ohio with his mother and siblings into a crowded house. He spent most nights sleeping on a cold floor or in a tiny closet. "It's just the situation we were in," Roger remembers.

Roger's childhood struggles taught him to be sensitive to others in need, and to build his life around something more than his own happiness. Then one day Roger came across a statistic about how many children didn't have beds in his home county of Lorain, Ohio. Stunned by this information, he decided to do something about it.

He found a nonprofit organization in Idaho called Sleep in Heavenly Peace that makes bunk beds for children in need. Roger flew to Idaho to learn how to make the bunk beds, then flew back to Ohio to start a chapter of this non-profit in his hometown. He recruited a team of volunteers and sponsors, and they began making bunk beds for children in need in Lorain, Ohio.

"It's all worth it when you see the smiles on the faces of these kids," Roger says. "There was this one little girl who asked: why are you doing this? I told her, because we love you." (3)

Roger found his life's purpose in building bunk beds for children who didn't have a bed. In other words, he found his life purpose in loving others. And his commitment to this purpose brings him great joy and inspires and touches the lives of others. Jesus' mission and message live on in his work.

Loving like Jesus also requires sacrifice. Sacrificing some part of yourself for something or someone you love only enlarges your love and grows you into the person God created you to be. In fact, I would argue that sacrifice is the greatest proof of love. Jesus told his disciples in our passage for today that if we love him, then he will show himself to us. What an astounding promise! Jesus will show himself to those who love him. And Jesus gave us the ultimate example of sacrificing himself for those he loved. So when we sacrifice ourselves in an act of love, we are letting the spirit of Jesus come alive in us.

Maryknoll just did a commissioning ceremony of lay men and women who have been trained to be missionaries along side their priests and brothers. Sometimes, they are fresh out of college and want a challenge before working, sometimes they are whole families who want to see a different way of being Christian and sometimes they are retired. Some sacrifices are great and some are small.

. You may have noticed that some of the DFAC staff are very friendly towards me and call me Uncle. When I was in college I worked in a warehouse and I believed in giving to charity. I gave money each month to the Aid to the Church in need. I "adopted" a ten year old boy. He had no family and when 14 wanted to get a skill. He wanted to go into shoe repair. Aid from my monthly contributions sent him to school not only to learn how to repair shoes but to run a shoe repair business.. When he was on his own, we kind of lost communication. His story goes on and he married a young girl and they had three children. They had a good life. One of their boys with the help of another charity went to a culinary school.. He also married and had children. Last Christmas, he left Camp Buehring after six years. He came here to send his son to college. The first college graduate in the family. IT all started with his grandfather and a shoe repair business on the streets of India.

And finally, loving like Jesus changes lives. Love is the most powerful force in the universe because it has the power of life in it. It has the power to create new things, to open minds, to heal hearts, to unite enemies, to make a difference. You cannot carry the power of love in your heart and mind and not be changed. This is how Jesus fulfilled his promise that he will show himself to those who love him. When we love like Jesus, he changes our identity and our priorities into his identity and his priorities. And that change doesn't just affect our lives. It affects all those around us too.

Back in 2006, Jean Vanier was receiving a humanitarian award for his work with people with disabilities.

In 1964, Vanier had witnessed how few social supports were available for people with disabilities in France. His faith in God motivated him to invite two men with intellectual disabilities to come live with him. Vanier discovered that this small sacrifice was a greater blessing to him than it was to his new friends.

He then began teaching others about the blessings of living in community with people who were different from them. Jean Vanier called his small home L'Arche [*rhymes with marsh*], which is French for "The Ark." Vanier's example inspired people all over the world to follow his example and to also create communities in which people with intellectual and physical disabilities could live among others without those same disabilities as families. Today, there are more than 150 L'Arche homes in 37 countries, all built on the principles of love that Jean Vanier taught. He passed away this year/

How did Jesus prepare his disciples to carry on his mission after he was gone? The same way he prepares us today. By giving us a singular purpose that requires sacrifice and that will change our lives. "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

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1. Center for the Governance of Change, IE University, 3/19, <https://www.ie.edu/cgc/research/tech-opinion-poll-2019/>.
 2. "AI religion is upon us. Welcome to the future." by Sigal Samuel, Sept. 9, 2019, 11:10am EDT <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2019/9/9/20851753/ai-religion-robot-priest-mindar-buddhism-christianity>.
 3. <https://becauseisaidiwould.com/because-he-loved-them/>.
 4. *The Jubilee Story of the China Inland Mission* by Marshall Broomhall. Cited at <http://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/sacrificial-love>.
 5. "How Jean Vanier broke my heart and saved my life" by Cathleen Falsani, May 9, 2019, *Religion News*, <https://religionnews.com/2019/05/09/how-jean-vanier-broke-my-head-and-saved-my-life/>.

A story from my life. You may have noticed that some of the DFAC staff are very friendly towards me and call me Uncle. When I was in college I worked in a warehouse and I believed in giving to charity. I gave money each month to the Aid to the Church in need. I "adopted" a ten year old boy. He had no family and when 14 wanted to get a skill. He wanted to go into shoe repair. Aid from my monthly contributions sent me to school not only to learn how to repair shoes but to run a shoe repair business.. When he was on his own, we kind of lost communication. His story goes on and he married a young girl and they had three children. They had a good life. One of their boys with the help of another charity went to a culinary school.. He also married and had children. Last Christmas, he left Camp Buehring after six years. He came here to send his son to college. The first college graduate in the family. IT all started with his grandfather and a shoe repair business on the streets of India.

There are many fine Christian relief organizations at work in our world. It is simply a reminder that sometimes the smallest gift can be used by Christ in a magnificent way.

Our lesson for the day from John's Gospel is set at the Last Supper. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his betrayal and crucifixion. The events that are coming will be traumatic for his disciples, but he wants them to know they will not be alone. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept,

because it neither sees nor knows him. But you know him, because he remains with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

When I think of orphans, I think of children like those I have sponsored in India, Lebanon and Africa. But somebody did care I did and so did others that kept these charitable organizations going and that made all the difference.

Our lesson for the day says to us that we need not live as orphans. There is someone who cares about us. Think about that for a moment. There are few things that can be more traumatic for human beings than to be orphaned at a young age. What can be more tragic than to be deprived of the love of a parent?

Of course, some very fine people have found themselves in this position. If you type into Google on your computer the search term "famous orphans," you will read the names of many outstanding people from many different fields who were able to accomplish much in life in spite of this misfortune.

You will read about such people as Eleanor Roosevelt. Roosevelt's mother, Anna Rebecca Hall, died from diphtheria in 1892. The next year, when Roosevelt was 9 years old, her father Elliott died from the same disease. Eleanor was raised by her maternal grandmother. Maybe this is what gave Roosevelt her great compassion for suffering people the world over when she became this country's First Lady, as well as in her service as a diplomat, author and writer.

Some other remarkable people were orphaned, not by the death of their parents, but because of a break-up of their families which resulted in them being put up for adoption. Notable among these are people like Steve Jobs, Nelson Mandela, musician John Lennon, President Andrew Jackson, and many others. Many great people have found themselves orphaned.

What I want to say to you, however, is that there are times when all of us feel like orphans. That is, there are times when we all feel helpless, alone, forsaken. Someone close to us is taken from us. Or we are confronted with the reality of our own mortality. Or for some reason we experience intense physical or psychological pain. At such times we may feel that even God has forsaken us.

Some people never recover from this experience of abandonment.

Some of you may remember the name Tom Sutherland, one of the men who was held hostage in Lebanon by terrorists for 6 1/2 years. According to one source, Sutherland was held in 26 different locations during his captivity. Some of his cells were cold, dark, underground holes only six by six in size.

After 18 months of captivity, Sutherland was put in solitary. That, too, was in an underground cell. He became so discouraged that he tried to commit suicide three different times by pulling a plastic bag over his head. Each time, however, he would think of his wife and three daughters and stop short of killing himself.

Tom Sutherland was a Christian when he was taken captive--he had even been an elder in his home church--but after his experience in Lebanon, he no longer believes in God. When asked why, Sutherland answered, "I prayed so many times, and so hard . . . and nothing happened." (2)

That is not a rare experience. And some people never quite recover from this dark night of the soul. Their sense of abandonment overwhelms them.

Bass Mitchell, a pastor in West Virginia, tells of working in his first job in a grocery store. He says that he started out as a bag boy but soon he was promoted. He was given his own aisle to stock.

Trucks brought in hundreds of boxes of food every week and he and the other grocery workers had to unpack them and put the stock on the shelves. Almost every week, however, they would open a box and find that some of the cans or cartons had been damaged. Some of the cans . . . had lost their labels, had dents, were crushed. Some were so badly damaged that some of the contents had come out.

Their manager told them not to put these damaged cans on the shelves because no one would buy them. So, they often would place them in a large basket in the front of the store. And on the basket was a large sign that read, "Damaged Goods. Cheap." But not very many people bought them. Most just ignored them. Often they ended up sending them back to the manufacturers.

"It seems to me," comments Mitchell on his experience, "that a lot of people, more than you might think, feel like this. Whatever the reason, things they've done, things life has done to them, things beyond their control, have made them feel like damaged goods . . . bent out of shape, crushed, of little value to themselves or anyone else." (3)

To use Jesus' metaphor, they feel like orphans. They feel that no one cares for them. But someone does care. God cares. God doesn't want any of His children to feel like orphans.

Some of you remember the story of a man who allowed God to help him overcome his feeling of abandonment. His name was James Cash Penney, better known by his first initials. At one time J. C. Penney was one of this country's most successful entrepreneurs. He made more than one fortune in his lifetime. But Penney also experienced more than his share of failures and heartbreaks along the way.

In 1898, Penney went to work for Guy Johnson and Thomas Callahan, who operated some small dry goods stores called Golden Rule Stores. Because of his tireless work ethic and his high ethical and moral standards, Penney succeeded in his work to the point of eventually buying out Johnson and Callahan and renaming the chain of stores.

But then in 1910, Penney's wife died, a crushing blow. At a friend's suggestion, Penney turned to philanthropy as a way to deal with his pain. In 1916, he met his second wife, but eight years later she suddenly died also. Penney married a third time, poured his life into his work, and by 1929 accumulated a net worth of \$40 million--that's back when \$40 million was a lot of money. Then the Great Depression wiped out all his wealth. Devastated emotionally and physically, Penney entered a sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan. As he lay in a sanitarium bed one day, he heard a familiar hymn coming from the chapel. The hymn was an old Gospel favorite titled "God Will Take Care of You." That song contained the message that Penney needed to hear. At this low point in his life he didn't want to live like an orphan. He wanted to know that someone cared about him. The doctors didn't expect him to live, but J. C. Penney decided he wasn't yet ready to give up. He cried out to God for help, and the Lord answered his request. His depression lifted, and soon he left the sanitarium. Once again he built his fortune and further established the company we know today as JCPenney. For decades, he gave away millions of dollars and shared his faith in God with anyone who would listen. He died at age ninety-five still trusting that God would take care of him. (4)

Just as a matter of interest, in 1940, during a visit to one of his stores in Des Moines, Iowa, Penney trained a young Penney's employee named Sam Walton on how to wrap packages with a minimal amount of paper and ribbon. That is the same Sam Walton who went on to found Wal-Mart, the world largest department store chain.

There is power in believing that you are not alone in this world. What a powerful promise Christ made to his disciples, though they could not see it at the time. They couldn't imagine that in a couple more days he would be put to death. And they certainly couldn't imagine that he would be resurrected on the third day or that he would send his Holy Spirit upon them fifty days later on the day of Pentecost. But everything he foretold came true. And it is still true today. If you are going through a difficult time right now, take him at his word: "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live." What great good news that is.

Fr Desiano

One of the most frequent, and moving, scenes is when children greet parents, and even grandparents, when they have been separated for a while—daddy's coming home, grandma visiting, mom's return from the hospital. These scenes have their opposite, too: when children are separated from their parents—maybe they are lost for an hour, or maybe a parent has died, or maybe children are put in cages far from their mothers and fathers—scenes we've seen too often. These help us know the primal, instinctive bonding that happens between children and their elders.

"I will not leave you orphans," Jesus says to his disciples in today's Gospel. He wants to spare us the ongoing grief of having been deprived of his presence and his guiding love. Aware as he is of the enormous bonding that has taken place between himself and his followers, Jesus knows that they will need special resources if they would continue being his followers—if they would ever mature enough in faith to go forth and act in his name.

He tells them he will send "another Advocate"—that is, another from God who will provide the resources that he did. What resources? Protection, guidance, and ongoing relationship. Because this is what Jesus gave to his disciples; and this is what Jesus continues to give to his Church through the Holy Spirit. Jesus protects, guides and continues to unite with us through the Holy Spirit that he sends upon us.

The Spirit's protection gives us the assurance of God's resilience and strength, especially when we are threatened. As we've read the Scriptures in these days after Easter, we see that proclaiming Jesus involves risk and leads to dangers. The first letter of Peter today speaks of Easter hope to a people who are already living in fear, who have already suffered for faith. "Be ready to give a reason for the hope that is inside of you," Peter urges; especially the hope that lets us stare down the threats of others. Once we have God's inner consolation, we are safe from threats and danger.

The Spirit also guides us. None of us knows what will happen tomorrow, or next week, or next year. Look at how confused we have been throughout this pandemic. So the followers of Jesus need a way to discern steps ahead when new situations arise. The Spirit helps us remember who Jesus is, what he taught, and how he lived. From this we continue to discern how to move ahead into an unclear future. While we do not have the guarantee of never making a mistake, we do have the assurance of Christ's gift of wisdom.

The Spirit also connects—connects us with Jesus, us with each other, us with the Father who sustains all because God dwells in all. The Spirit even sees our connections with people we once thought strangers, as we see in the first reading. Jesus has revealed to us the extent of the Father's care and love for us; he has also shown us how we can trust in, yes, even abide in God. This happens through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who allows us to identify with God in a way that makes all other union we may experience in life only a sharing in that basic union that we have with God. The Spirit lets us see our lives as experiences of divine indwelling.

We've not been left orphans. Jesus loves us so much he continues to protect, guide and unite with us. In this way, if we have received the Spirit, we can continue his work by the way we protect, guide, and love each other. We are not orphans; we can give to others what has been abundantly given to us!