

* The sixth Sunday after Christ's resurrection is the last one before Ascension. This year it falls on Thursday, May 21st. Christ's Ascension symbolically represents by his rise from a low state, to a high one and ending in the heavenly realm. While on earth, Christ dwelled with people, but now in heaven, he is the ruler and Lord of all. By entering heaven as the sacrificial representative for mankind, he completed the work of our salvation and guarantee the eventual glorification of all who love him. Accordingly, the main topic for today is 'Love'. It is a very important subject for studying as well as for practicing because the nature of our Lord is love, and we received a new command from him, to love one another.

* Before his ascension Jesus called into his followers into by opening their minds to comprehend Scripture through a new command. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another," (Joh 13:34). Significantly, unlike the Law of Moses, given by God at Mount Sinai, with include a large number of commands, statues and restrictions, the Law of Jesus Christ contained this new one. Little children can grasp it, but it is difficult to follow. Actually adults also have problems to follow in all its dots. If it's so, then, you may ask, what is a reason to have a command that no one can always follow? The one reason is in Christ's exaltation and glorification.

* Permit me to ask a rhetorical question. Could you believe a man who says he never met a person he didn't like? Come now, can any of us stand and say, that without exception, we have liked every single person with whom we have ever met? Thinking over my life, I came to the conviction that by nature I am never sufficient. For example, my providing care for someone sporadically is much easier than my caring for someone for months or even decades. Keeping this in mind, I'd like to tell the fairytale, "The Fisherman and the Fish," by Alexander Pushkin, a Russian poet and novelist. It should remind us of our moral bankruptcy. Here it is the story.

* Once upon a time an old man and his wife were living in poverty on the shore of the blue sea. For many years they lived in a tiny cabin. The man made a living by fishing, while his wife spun cloth. One day he caught a small gold fish in his net. The fish begged him, "Let me go, old man. I will reward you for my freedom by giving you anything you desire. "The fisherman was astonished and frightened because he had never before

seen a talking fish. He let the fish go and said kindly to it, “God bless you, golden fish. I don’t need anything from you.” When he went back home he told his wife the wonderful story about what had happened to him at the shore. Upon hearing the news his wife became enraged. “You are such a fool not to make a wish to ask for a washtub, since ours is broken!” she said..” So she sent him to ask the fish for a new washtub, and the fish happily granted this small request. The next day, the wife asked for a new house, and after that to be a member of the upper class, and the fish granted all of these requests. But the wife was not satisfied and asked to have a palace, to become the ruler and the queen of her province. When the fisherman arrived home, he found a great palace, with his wife seated on the throne. Knights and other noblemen were her servants. Around her stood dangerous guards. The old man was terrified but approached the queen and said, “Greetings, Your Majesty. I hope you are happy now.” She did not even look at him, and the guards drove him out. Finally, she demanded to become the Ruler of the Sea with the fish as her servants to fulfill every fancy. With each request, the sea had become more and more violent, finally after the last desire the golden fish’s patience ran out and the fish disappeared. Later, the man returned home—where he found the former cabin, a broken washtub, and his poor old wife sitting by the door.

* The characters in this fiction can be applied to each of us. No one is perfect and nobody loves like Christ commands, no one is completely satisfied with they have, no one can love perfectly. Like the gold fish, we may be able to benefit a person, but we are restricted by a person’s wickedness. It’s clear the gold fish is a champion among us as much as it represents for a great benefactor. But in view of a person’s fury even the great benefactor could not bear a one’s excessive desire. Therefore on our own we are never sufficient to always be kindly, loving helpers, especially when are rewarded with a poor feedback. But in spite of this we received the command, “Love each other.”

* Now, let’s see what Greek philosophy says about ‘Love.’ It distinguishes the four types of ‘Love’: *Storge* (parental affection); *Phileo* (the love of friends); *Eros* (sexual love and that of spiritual nature); and *Agapao* (a self-giving to one in need). It is important to know what kind of love we are entrusted to have. Did Jesus command us to keep storge, phileo, eros or agapao? The key words for understanding are found in the second part of the command. The (v.12) of the lesson says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I

have loved you.” The people who follow Jesus must love each other in the same manner as He has loved.

Christ’s earthly ministry was highlighted with caring for spiritual and physical needs of people in attendance.

The apotheosis of Christ’s agapao was revealed in light of his cross, resurrection, ascension and His sending of the Holy Spirit. No doubt, Christ loves us ‘agapely,’ in self-giving manner. We are commanded to respond adequately, in a self-giving manner as he said, “...love one another as I have loved you.”

* Before Christ’ Ascension, in response to this single command the disciples could only offer Philia, (the love of friends). By reading (Joh 21:15-17) in Greek this insight can be seen better. Three times Peter was asked by Jesus, “Do you love me?” In two inquiries Jesus used the word ἀγαπάω (agapao). But Peter said φιλέω (phileo). Actually the original dialog happened in Aramaic that has only one basic word for love as well as English has, for instance. In addition to that the words ἀγαπάω and φιλέω are not distinguished in common sense in Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT). However, the most scholars prove that placing two different words with similar meaning in one context must have the reason; mainly it was done in order to show man’s insufficiency to love by self-giving manner, agapao. Now let’s read of the conversation between Jesus and Peter. As the disciples and the Lord were eating breakfast, Jesus asked, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love/agapas Me more than these?" Peter said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love/philo You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My lambs." A second time, Jesus said, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love/agapas Me?" Peter answered, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love (philo) You." Jesus said, "Shepherd My sheep." But after descending of the Holy Spirit, Peter was enabled to respond Jesus adequately.

* Ten days later, after Jesus’ ascension, the Holy Spirit was sent. It affected Peter and many, including us. Now Peter and all saints in Christ are enabled to love (agapao). "Yes, Lord; You know that I agapao You; it was Peter’s answer and millions others throughout their Christian’s lives. This is not a fairy tale. Inspired by the Holy Spirit Peter remained as a faithful shepherd and confessor. By words and deeds he being to demonstrate the self-giving love even to the end. when he was crucified on a cross. “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends,” (v.13) it was Jesus’ sacrificial offering; in response, Peter asked his executors for an upside-down cross, he died on the cross not for our sins but through that Jesus was exalted and glorified. The Christian world has accepted the apostle Peter as pin example of self-giving love. Now let say,

“The Fisherman and the Fish,” remains an illustrative paradigm of sin in us meanwhile Peter’s life proves the new born nature in us, so Christians are saints and sinners simultaneously.

* You may say, “no way pastor, we cannot response adequately to this agape-love because we are sinners.” Friends, the true disciples of the Lord Jesus certainly can response adequately because the ‘Love of God’ already dwells in their hearts and minds. You know our fellow Christians, Edna Willams and Bob Majewski, like every one else. are not perfect. But a half of bread is still bread. They are living illustrations for us as to how Christians must care and share. Certainly we are able to reflect the ‘Love of God’ adequately as the beloved children of the Father because we are not alone. The Helper, Paraclete, by the power of Jesus’ love, melts our hearts and minds to care, to forgive and to help in self-giving manner.

* I have some advise, come to church on a regular basis. Here, invisible God will empower you through the Word and Sacraments; it is like gasoline that empowered a car to go. Remember, the skill never comes by itself, it demands practice. Friends, I promise to help you to avoid the well known confession, “we don’t love God from all our hearts and our neighbors as yourselves.” I mean we will not use the Divine Service # 2 from our Hymnals. Next, in order to better love for our needy brother or sister, we should deny ourselves.

The (1Jn 3:18) says, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

* Here it is another truth. Although the Holy Spirit is the creator of our faith, He does not believe for us. In the same way though God is the source of our sanctification, He does not do our good works for us. “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do,” (Eph 2:10). And last of all, after Christ’s ascension, the disciples received the Holy Spirit. He permanently enabled them to love/agapao each other as the Lord has commanded us to do also. In the Spirit we can bear the confession even to death, if it is necessary; in the Spirit we can bless our enemies, if it is necessary; in the Spirit we can forgive and do good until its necessary. Through these things our Lord is exalted and glorified. Thanks be to God. Beloved, let them know that “we are Christians by our love, by our love.” “Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible,” (Eph 6:24).

Amen.