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St. Anthony of Padua Parish, Effingham, Illinois
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The Fourth Sunday of the Year (C)

What must it have been like for Jesus to know that members of his family, his friends, the citizens who knew him so well - and yet not well enough - attempted to "hurl him down headlong" (Luke 4:29). Jesus came to "to bring glad tidings to the poor [and] to proclaim liberty to captives" - he came for love - and the people wanted to kill him because of it (Luke 4:18).

Notice how Jesus responds to his would be murderers: "But Jesus passed through the midst of them and went away" (Luke 4:30). Because the people of Nazareth would not accept his love he journeyed on to share his love with those who would accept him. He simply left.

How do we respond to similar situations? Someone falsely accuses us, a gossip harms our reputation, a thief steals from us, a family member disappoints us and hurts us. Too often our response is one of anger and revenge. We hold our grudges and set up our defenses so as not to be hurt again. We begin to plan our method of attack and we seek to harm the one who has hurt us, all the while claiming to act justly. Only rarely do we stop to consider that we have done the same to others. This is not the response of Jesus Christ and it cannot be our response, either.

Jesus passed through their midst, "resolutely determined to go to Jerusalem" to go to Calvary to show the depth of his love (Luke 9:51). As he journeyed to the Cross he continually prayed, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). His love never failed.

Before he ascended the throne of the Cross, Jesus said: "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you" (John 15:12). We who dare to claim the name of Christian must love as Jesus loves and we must love in all circumstances. When we go to work or to school we must do so in love. When we buy the groceries or prepare a meal we must do so in love. When we clean our bedroom or come to Mass we must do so in love. When we continue our duties even when sick, we must do so in love, else wise "I am nothing" and "I gain nothing" (I Corinthians 13:2-3). We cannot withhold our love from anyone, nor can we put any conditions on our love. Our love must be overflowing, free and generous. If we do not love in this way - if we do not yearn for the good of everyone else above our own - we do not follow Christ; we follow our own ego.

The Beloved Disciple says this: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us" (I John 4:11-12). For this reason

Saint Paul calls love the "still more excellent way" and the "greatest" (I Corinthians 12:31, 13:13).

When I have failed to love like Jesus and have hurt you by something I have said or done in my own sinful impatience and pride, I offer my heartfelt apology and I humbly beg your forgiveness.

We will stumble and fall along the way, each and every one of us. The task before us is always to offer love and to yield to love. Through our eyes the love of Christ must look out upon the world. This is the way of Christ; this is the way of love.

Let us, then, follow after the Master. Through love, let us mend the broken relationships among us; let all grudges be ended and all anger cease; let us "put aside childish things" and draw close to the heart of Christ (I Corinthians 13:11).

The early Church grew and flourished because of the witness of love given by the early Christians. So faithfully did the early Church love that the apologist Tertullian could say, "What marks us in the eyes of our enemies is our loving kindness. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another'" (*Apology* 39.7).

May the same be said of us. May we always echo in our hearts the request of the opening Collect of today's Mass: "Lord our God, help us to love you with all our hearts and to love all men as you love them." Amen.