



Marseille Chaplaincy with Aix-en-Provence and the Luberon.

LENT REFLECTION 6 - THE CROSS OF LOVE.

As we begin this reflection it might be worth remembering that when the world speaks of love it most often refers to "being in love" based on sexual attraction. Or it is an exaggerated version of "like" as in "I love strawberries." This is not the kind of love we are speaking about when we look at God's love.

The greek word (and there are 4 words in greek for love) is **agape** and this describes the sacrificial, unconditional love that always seeks the good of the other and never for itself. (The other words used for love in the Bible are *storge* which is used for familial love such as a parent for a child and *philia* which is used for affectionate regard, friendship or brotherly love.) What we see on the cross when Jesus is crucified is the unconditional, self-giving love of God wonderfully expressed in Jesus' words spoken to Nicodemus.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." John 3:16-17.

Elsewhere in John's Gospel Jesus also says this:

"My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command." John 15:12-14

When we look at Jesus dying in agony on the cross after being falsely accused, unjustly convicted, whipped and mocked what we are witnessing is the extent of God's love for us. The punishment that should be ours for our callous disregard for God's way of love and forgiveness, was laid on His one and only Son, Jesus. His death provides the perfect sacrifice for each one of us; for our failures, our selfishness, our pride and our rebellion against God. From the Cross Jesus looks at us with love and proclaims our forgiveness. The first person to realise this was one of the thieves dying next to Jesus. Such love is truly amazing and we are so undeserving.

Jesus' death on the cross also releases love for all of us. It is the source of love which flows freely into us when we come in repentance to Jesus. It is given through the gift of the Holy Spirit as we see at Pentecost when joyful, seemingly drunk disciples, spill out onto the streets of Jerusalem declaring the greatness of God. Read it in Acts 2 if you like. And God's love is infinite and limitless. It never runs out. Alleluia! He gives His love freely to us so that we can love others as He loves us. So it certainly is the Cross of love. A verse from a much loved Good Friday hymn:

***Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.***

Things to ponder:

1. This week is Holy Week when we remember the Last Supper and the Agape feast that Jesus shared with his friends and then His death on the Cross on Good Friday. If you are able find a church service to go to then go. If not try to take some special quiet time of Friday meditating on the Cross and God's love for us.
2. Ask God to help you be more loving especially to those you find hard to love. Pray for them asking that God will help you see them as He sees them.
3. Meditate on this Bible passage from Romans 5:1-11.



"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we^[b] boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we^[c] also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

4. You might like to end with this prayer from St Paul which I have personalised!

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen me with power through his Spirit in my inner being, so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that I may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:14-21

May you have a blessed Holy Week and a joyful Easter.
With my love and prayers for all who have journeyed with me through Lent using these Reflections.