

SERMON ON LOVE, Sunday, September 1, 2019

In the Gospel of St. John, chapter 13, verse 35, it says, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” The entire story of the Gospel is a story of love. God the Father sacrifices His beloved Son and offers Him up to horrible persecutions, abuse and ultimately a horrific, ignominious death — out of love. Our Savior Himself voluntarily comes into the world, “puts on human flesh” as St. Athanasius the Great says, and offers Himself to save us through His redemptive suffering for sinful mankind — out of love. All of the 12 Apostles, except for one, suffers a martyr’s death. The chiefs of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, along with the other disciples, suffer imprisonment, beatings, cursings and all sorts of dishonor and abuse. Ultimately they give themselves up to execution — out of love. If we truly love God and truly identify ourselves as His disciples, they we would voluntary suffer no less for our faith and convictions — out of love. If we love God, then we will also love each other. Every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. How we speak to others, how we treat others, whether or not we care about and help others, it is the same thing as if we did it to God. There is a story behind every person. There is a reason they are the way they are. Think about that, and respect them for who they are. Don’t be lazy and make judgments about people. Be kind. Ask about their stories. Be humble. Be open. Be open minded and willing to learn. Be willing to admit that we were wrong about something. Be a good neighbor. No matter what happens in life, be nice to people. Think about what you can do to make someone happy today, and do it. Set an example. Treat everyone with kindness and respect, even those who are rude to you — not because they are nice, but because you are. The most memorable people in your life will be the ones who loved you when you were not very lovable. Remember this, and return the favor. In a relationship, the little things often mean the most. Be 100% present for those you love, that is enough. It’s ok to be angry. It’s never ok to be cruel. In disagreements with others, deal only with the present situation. Don’t bring up the past. Compliment people. Magnify their strengths, not their weaknesses. This is how to make a difference. It only takes a moment of hate to devastate a lifetime of love, whereas a moment of love can break barriers between people that took a lifetime to build. If you take everything personally, you will be offended for the rest of your life. What other people do is often because of them, not you. Be thankful for all the rude, obnoxious and difficult people you meet in life too. They teach us patience and humility. They teach us how not to be. Love is the most powerful force in the world today. It was love that conquered the mighty Roman Empire and replaced the imperial eagle with the Cross of Christ. It was love that caused Christianity to grow so rapidly and conquer the hearts of so many people and nations throughout the world. If Christianity seems to be dying, it is because our love is dying, it is because, as it says in Holy scripture, in the end times, “because iniquity shall abound, the love of many will wax cold,” Matthew 24:12. If we love others, we are imitating God. If we show love to others, we are showing love to God himself. If we forgive others their debts against us, then God will also forgive us our sins. The road to peace, the road to happiness, the road to salvation is the road of love. Never forget, God is love. Put on the breastplate of love and kindness, and you will conquer kingdoms and move mountains. May we be responsible Christians and good examples to others, so that all men will know that we are the disciples of Christ, by the love that we have for one another. Amen.