

+ J. M. J.

Archbishop Dolan in his book *Priests for the Third Millennium* relates a story about St. John. He was exiled on the Island of Patmos and the last of the apostles. You can imagine he must have been a celebrity among early Christians and would have had many visitors. His disciples would carry this frail disciple advanced in age out to the crowd and he would address them. **“Children, love one another! Children, love one another!”** His disciples asked him why he kept repeating the same thing. To this he replied because **“the Master kept repeating it over and over.”**

Can we hear Jesus saying that, over and over? **“Children, love one another!”** In the reading from the Gospel, Jesus says that he gives us **“a new commandment: love one another;”** however, this commandment was already written in the Old Law. **“Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself”** (Lev. 19:18). How can this commandment be new when it was already given to Moses and the Israelites?

Recall that scene from the Book of Revelation. John sees **“a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away.”** Then one seated on the throne who we know to be Jesus says **“Behold, I make all things new.”** Indeed the command to love your neighbor had been around from the beginning, but that didn’t make it easy. When sin enters into the world it’s awfully hard to love our neighbor when our neighbor is a jerk or when our neighbor insults us, slights us, or just is plain mean. What is our first reaction? Jesus came into the world, takes that commandment and says see, let me show you how to love. We needed someone of our very kind to in flesh and blood respond the right way in this sinful world, and so Jesus, God united with man, shows us how to love, and he takes that law and says **“love one another. As I have loved you, so you should love one another.”**

How do we go about this? Start with the obvious people, our husband, our wife, our kids, our parents, our grandparents, our brothers and sisters. We have to tell them that we love them, but they already

know that I love them. Jesus told us to **“love one another as I love you,”** (John 15:12) and Jesus over and over told and tells us how much he loves us. Tell our loved ones that we love them.

Secondly, we have to spend time with the people we love. I know we’re busy and pulled in all kinds of different directions. In that same chapter in that book by Archbishop Dolan, he said his parents would each day sit an hour by themselves just talking. In seminary a bunch of us got in the habit of praying an hour each day before the Blessed Sacrament. O in seminary that was so easy. As a priest I have to fight to get those moments, but I schedule it every day. Likewise we have to spend quiet time talking and sharing with our loved ones, forcing it into our busy schedule if necessary. It’s interesting. When we’re on our deathbed the only thing that’s going to matter is our relationships. We’re not going to wish we had spent more time at work, watched more TV, played more golf, or whatever else. We’re going to wish we loved our family more.

Finally, we have to love those annoying people, which may or may not coincide with members of our family. St. Paul gave us the antidote for dealing with annoying people. He tells us how to get revenge. **“if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head”** (Rom. 12:20). If we want to get back at someone the recipe is to be kind, to respond in love. That’s what scripture tells us. They will either be absolutely infuriated or our love will soften their hard heart.

“Children, love one another! Children, love one another!” It sounds so simple, but our lived experience tells us that it can be difficult; however, we have Jesus and of course we receive him physically into our bodies as we approach the Eucharist. If we are open and pray to let him change us, we will learn to love as Jesus loved. We will be transformed, and we will have profound joy.

May God bless you!