

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

You'll have to forgive me for dating myself musically, but as I reflected on our Gospel text for today, a number of songs from the past came to my ancient mind. I remembered the refrain from the musical "Oliver"---"where, oh where, is love. Does it fall from skies above? Is it underneath the willow tree that I am dreaming of?"

Then, I thought of Tevya in "Fiddler on the Roof" asking his wife, "Goldie, do you love me?"

Finally, in my musical mind I heard Tina Turner belting out, "What's love got to do with it?"

Coming back to the Gospel, hearing Jesus speak to his disciples, and to us, the answer to Tina's question is "apparently everything"

What's unique about today's Gospel is that Jesus speaks for the first time of the disciples' love for him. He often called them to believe in him and to trust him, but now he goes to the deep, interpersonal level of asking them to love him for who he is. The only other time in the Gospels that Jesus speaks of a disciple's love for him is after the resurrection when he asks Peter if he loves him.

He tells his disciples that they demonstrate their love for him by keeping his commandments. At first blush that sounds like a very conditional kind of loving, even a legalistic way of loving. But Jesus is not talking about a commandment of the law, but a commandment of the heart.

We all speak of love and when we do it is always filtered through our own personal experience. For the orphan Oliver, he's just hoping for someone to care enough for him to offer him a home, a warm bed, a satisfying meal. That's the love that would suffice for him.

In responding to Tevya question, "Do you love me?" Goldie considers her 25 years of washing, cooking, bearing children, and working beside her husband. With no stars in her eyes, her graying hair and calloused hands, her constant worry over him and their children, she responds, "I suppose I do".

In her soulful wail, poor Tina Turner, cynically questions for all who have been hurt or abused or disappointed by it, if love is even real. "What's love but second hand emotion... What's love but a sweet, old-fashioned notion...Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?"

Obviously, the love of which Jesus speaks is far more than the desire of Oliver, the experience of Tevya and Goldie, and the pain of Tina. When Jesus speaks of loving him,

he's talking about love as he has experienced it in the love between him and his Father. The love between Jesus and His Father is a mutual devotion born of their identification with each other. In his relationship with His Father, obedience has nothing to do with rules. It's about loving one another and sharing the same desire.

When Jesus asks us to love him He is asking us to be one with God in real life. He is inviting us to develop the learned capacity to recognize God within ourselves, as well as in others, and in all things. To love Jesus by doing as he has commanded us to is to find union with God in the Eucharist, in moments of creativity or flashes of awe-filled wonder. It is to unite ourselves to God in silent prayer and exuberant praise. It is to be opened to the overwhelming love that carries us beyond ourselves into the very source of life, the very source of love.

Coming back to my musical mind, I believe, Andrew Lloyd Webber in his musical "Aspects of Love", captures the love Jesus is talking about in this Gospel text, if we understand what John tells us in his first letter that God is love.

Andrew Lloyd Webber puts it in these words:

Love, love changes everything. Hands and faces, earth and sky. Love , love changes everything. How you live and how you die. Love can make the summer fly or a night seem like a lifetime.

Yes, love , love changes everything. Now I tremble at your name. Nothing in the world will ever be the same.

Love, love changes everything. Days are longer, words mean more. Love, love changes everything . Pain is deeper than before.

Love will turn your world around and that world will last forever. Yes, love, love changes everything.

Brings you glory, brings you shame. Nothing in the world will ever be the same.

Off into the world we go, planning futures, shaping years.

Love bursts in and suddenly all our wisdom disappears.

Love makes fools of everyone. All the rules we make are broken.

Yes, love, love changes everyone. Live or perish in its flames.

Love will never, ever, ever let you be the same. Love will never, ever, ever let you be the same.

I pray may we all find such love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.