

John 19:25-27

The word *love* is thrown around rather flippantly these days. We “love” this movie. We “love” that entertainer. We “love” that type of food. The list can go on and on of things that we “love.”. Our journey to love and be loved in a meaningful and rich way ultimately guides us to Jesus and the cross.

But what do we often do instead? We seek love in relationships that might not be the best for us. We seek love in physical attraction and romantic feelings when there might not be much else there. We seek love from our pets and our fair-weather friends. We crave bonds with people on the internet without any real-life experiences with them. Our love tank can be filled with things that we love, such as hobbies and activities, vacations and extreme sports, groups and gatherings. But the love that we possess from such things can never reach the most personal recesses of our souls like Christ’s love can.

The love between us and Christ is often compared to a marital love. We as the Church are the Bride and Jesus is the Bridegroom who is committed to giving himself completely to us, even unto death. We see that to-the-death love on full display on the cross. Jesus loved us so much that he died for us. St. Paul reveals how astonishing that kind of love is when he says, “One will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:7-8).

Christ died for us when we did not deserve it at all. He died for us because of his unconditional love for us. He loves us no

matter what we have done. He loves us because we have been created by God and are dearly loved by him.

That is why Jesus said from the cross that John take his mother, Mary, home to be with him. He was making a bond of love permanent in the words, “Behold your son” and “Behold your mother” (John 19:26-27). Jesus wants us to treat each other like family, too, whether biological or not, as we live in the shadow of the cross and as we live in the aftermath of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Are there people in your life that you find it hard to love them? Love anyway. And I know it is hard to do that. But Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44). That is exactly what Jesus did on the cross, forgiving his tormentors and welcoming a repentant criminal into his kingdom. He did not show any anger when the soldiers whipped him and beat him, twisted a crown of thorns on his head and put a purple robe around his soldiers.. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” Jesus said on the cross (Luke 23:34).

As the day of crucifixion came to a close, the soldiers were preparing to break the legs of the three on the crosses to hasten death. But when they saw that Jesus was already dead, they chose not to break his legs. But in order to determine that Jesus was truly dead, one soldier pierced the body of Jesus in the side with a spear. Blood and water ran out and poured upon the ground.

In other words, love streamed forth from Jesus and from the cross. That is why John 3:16 is so popular and remembered among us, because it reminds us of the love. “God so loved

the world, that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

The story of Jesus on the cross is at its heart a love story—God’s love for Jesus and God’s love for us.

This divine love story continues in our lives, especially during Lent. It continues in the kindness and compassion we show to one another in the same manner as Christ showed to those around him. Our love for the Lord continues in our worship of him in services like this one. God’s love for us is revealed in the blessings of this life that are undeserved—things such as clothing and food, shelter and work, church and family, friends and loved ones. That is God’s love in action.

Be guided to the cross. Be guided to love. Be complete in that love, and live in it forever. Jesus has made it all happen, and we love him for it, even more than we may realize.

Amen.