

Divine Love

Acts 14: 21b-27; Ps. 145; Rev. 21: 1-5a; Jn. 13: 1, 31-33a, 34-35

St. Maximilian Kolbe was a Catholic priest in Poland during the Second World War. In 1941, he was arrested and sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp. One prisoner escaped so, in reprisal, ten men were selected to be executed. St. Maximilian offered to take the place of one of the chosen who was a young family man. After two weeks of starvation and dehydration, St. Maximilian died.

Jesus gave His disciples ‘a new commandment’ that they should love one another ‘just as I have loved you’. The ancient Jewish law called for each person to love his neighbour as himself (Lev. 19: 18), but Jesus’ new commandment called for His disciples to love each other as He had loved them...all the way to the Cross. St. Maximilian Kolbe demonstrated this fullness of Christian love when he offered his life for another. Hopefully, none of us will be put in a position of giving up our lives to follow Jesus’ commandment, but He is certainly calling us to sacrifice ourselves in the service of others.

Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *The Tipping Point*, wrote about an experiment conducted among a group of seminarians at Princeton Theological Seminary. Each seminarian was asked to prepare a short talk on a biblical theme and then walk to a nearby building to present it. On the way to the presentation, each student encountered a man slumped in an alleyway, head down, eyes closed, coughing and groaning. Who would stop and offer help to the man?

Before sending them on their way, the seminarians were given a questionnaire asking them why they had chosen to study theology. Were they looking for a practical tool for finding meaning in everyday life or did they see religion as a means for personal and spiritual fulfillment? Also, the seminarians were given different themes for their talk. One group was to speak on the relevance of the professional clergy to the religious vocation. The other group was given the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Finally, as they were being sent out to go to their presentation, some people were told that they were late; that they had been expected a few minutes ago and that they needed to hurry. Others were told that they had a few minutes before their audience was ready for them but that they could start on their way and take their time in arriving.

The experimenter predicted that the seminarians who indicated that they wanted to help people and those who were reminded of the importance of compassion by having just used the parable of the Good Samaritan as the basis for their presentation would be the most likely to stop to offer aid to the troubled man.

The prediction was totally incorrect. The reasons for entering the seminary and even thinking about the parable of the Good Samaritan did not significantly increase helping behaviour. In fact, it was reported that, on several occasions a seminarian going to give his talk literally stepped over the coughing and groaning man. The only thing that mattered was whether the student was in a rush. Of the students who were told they were late, only ten percent stopped to help. Of the group who had a few minutes to spare, sixty-three percent stopped.

Jesus tells us that we should put nothing ahead of our love for each other. He encourages us to go beyond the *human love* called for in the law and to follow His example of *divine love*; a supernatural love that calls us to serve others even at the sacrifice of ourselves. Only then, will we see the ‘new Jerusalem’ on earth. Only then, will we begin to know God and to be truly pleasing to Him.