

THE LOVE WE NEED: 5TH SUNDAY EASTER C

Some people say they don't read newspapers anymore because there's too much bad news in them. They have a point. A while back e.g. a national newspaper ran stories about footballers knowingly or unknowingly taking banned performance-enhancing substances; a pedestrian killed by a hit-run driver; the drug cocaine being extracted from items of clothing and sold for a fortune; a factory collapsing in Bangladesh and killing two hundred and seventy-three persons, and hundreds and thousand of persons killed in Syria's civil war. News like that may well turn people off newspapers.

Thank God such bad news is not all the news there is! On its front page a while back the same paper ran a story about Eugene ('Curly') Veith, a rich man and a Christian, aged 94. As business prospered, Curly says that he *'used to lie awake at night thinking of the hungry and homeless children all over the world. So I decided to give all my money away to help them!'* About \$23 million so far! Mr Veith has set up Mission Enterprise Limited to channel funds to worthy causes everywhere - American Indians in Colorado, street kids in Bangkok, water wells in East Africa, land for a school in Queensland.

More than that, with the courage of his convictions he has been going to other rich businessmen and businesswomen and challenging them to give generously to people and projects in need. Clearly this elderly gentleman has taken strongly to heart today's message of Jesus to his friends and followers the night before he died for them: *'I give you a new commandment: love one another; just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples'* (Jn 13:34-35)

At an isolated roadhouse in North West Queensland, two children aged 8 and 6 tell a visiting traveller about a play they have staged at their local church. They have teamed up with a friend to dramatize how Jesus wants us to love one another. The first child gets a phone call from Jesus to say he will be coming along that day and will want some help. The two children are to keep a lookout for him. Well, Jesus does arrive in the guise of a third child who has hurt her knee and is looking for some first aid. One of the first two reaches out to help and asks the second who is talking to Jesus on the phone to also help. She says she is too busy talking to Jesus, and is still waiting for him to arrive. But in the end she too goes to help the injured one. At the end of the day she receives another phone call from Jesus. He thanks her for helping him. She says she doesn't understand. She waited and waited for him, she points out, but he didn't turn up. Then Jesus explains that he did arrive after all, in the form of the child that needed help.

That's the wonderful thing about the kind of love that Jesus wants of us. It's a love modelled on his kind of love. He showed his love for people in so many wonderful ways – in kindness, compassion, generosity, patience, perseverance, endurance, faithfulness and forgiveness. There was no limit to what his love would give or where it would go.

The love which imitates the love of Jesus for others is therefore a practical, down-to-earth kind of love. It's a kindness and compassion kind of love, a self-forgetting kind of love, a self-

sacrificing kind of love even to the point, as shown by so many brave soldiers in two World Wars, of giving up their own lives so that others might be free. Free to be good, kind, unselfish, generous and loving persons too!

It's our love for others that keeps the great love of Jesus for people alive in our world today. An American journalist, watching Mother Teresa of Calcutta caring for a man with gangrene, remarked to her: *'I wouldn't do that for a million dollars.'* Mother Teresa replied: *'Even I wouldn't do it for that amount, but I do it for love of God.'*

True love is the opposite of selfishness. Selfishness confines us, keeps us shut in. It builds barriers, even walls, between us and others. What frees us is caring about others and caring for others - being friends, being sisters and brothers, being good neighbours. In short, it's love alone that frees us from the cage of selfishness. A doctor, who has shared some of the deepest moments in the lives of many patients, says that people facing death don't think about the degrees they've earned, the positions they've held, or how much wealth they've amassed. What matters at the end is just whom you have loved and who has loved you.

Love always demands the best from us, and brings out the best in us. Being loved gives us a surprising energy and courage. Love makes us fruitful and productive, strong and constant in doing good. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, famous for her work on the stages of dying, has written: *'Love is the flame that warms our soul, energises our spirit and supplies passion to our lives. It's our connection to God and to one another.'*

To love is to heal, both those who receive it and those who give it. To refuse to love is to die. To decide to love is to live. But love is a choice, not a feeling, and when we choose to be loving, caring, healing, helping, and forgiving persons, we experience well-being, contentment and happiness.

Freedom from selfishness and freedom to love and care for others, surely that's what life is all about! There's really no other way. So Jesus insists, strongly insists: *'Love one another, as I have loved you'* (Jn 13:34)

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