

Some years ago a popular song told us, "What the world needs now is love, sweet love." Perhaps the composer of this song was inspired by St Paul's letter to the Corinthians. At any rate, Paul would totally agree with the main lines of the song.

The section we read today has been correctly called a hymn of love. I suppose too we might name it a hymn to love. Many would argue that the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians is not merely the finest prose in St Paul's letters but also in the entire New Testament. It's the most quoted section of the NT; it's practically mandatory for weddings. The Holy Spirit was working overtime when He inspired Paul on this meditation on love. Ah, Love!

All of us at some time have asked in one form or another, "What is love?" There are of course many answers to the question. The one offered by mystics may ultimately be the best answer. They would say simply that love is a person. His name is Jesus. And, if you want to be an authentic lover, become like Jesus. To paraphrase Nobel Prize laureate Seamus Heaney, He is the "lure let down from heaven to tempt the soul to rise."

Another author further suggests this strategy for our quest. Wherever Paul mentions the word "love," we should substitute the word "Jesus."

Listen! Jesus is always patient and kind. He is never jealous. He is never boastful or conceited. He is never rude or selfish. He does not take offense and is not resentful. He takes no pleasure in other people's sins but delights in the truth. He is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes.

The glorious language fits our Lord pretty well, doesn't it? But suppose that wherever St Paul mentions love, we substitute our own names. Now we start to squirm a bit because we are definitely sure the description doesn't always fit us.

However, we might better be able to substitute our own names with more confidence if we were to begin to practice what someone has called the Golden Rules for Living:

- If you open it, close it.
- If you turn it on, turn it off.
- If you unlock it, lock it up.
- If you break it, admit it.
- If you can't fix it, call in someone who can.
- If you borrow it, return it.
- If you value it, take care of it.
- If you make a mess, clean it up.
- If you move it, put it back.
- If it belongs to someone else, get permission to use it.
- If you don't know how to operate it, leave it alone.
- If it's none of your business, don't ask questions.

Aldous Huxley, professor of the Humanities at MIT and a world-class intellectual, told a friend, "...it's rather embarrassing to have spent one's entire lifetime pondering the human condition and to come toward its close and find that I really don't have anything more profound to pass on by way of advice than, 'Try to be a little kinder.'"

St Paul would say, "Amen to that!"

But there is a second part to today's passage.

"When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, think as a child, reason as a child. When I became a man I put aside childish things." Why did St. Paul feel the need to attach this to his great ode to love?

What does being an adult, not a child, have to do with "love is patient, love is kind, it is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, or rude, or self-serving, or quick tempered, or sulking, etc.? Simply enough, a child has to be taught to be patient, and kind, not jealous, etc. Some people never learn the lesson and remain childish. And sometimes all of us are spiritually immature.

Love is patient. Patience is difficult. It is something we want everyone else to have with us while we put limits on the patience we have with others. It's as though we drive through life with our hands on the horn of our cars. We want our needs to be met now. We want that person in front of us to get moving as soon as the light turns green. At the same time we often don't always rush to respond to the needs of others. When a baby wants something, the baby wants it immediately and will cry to get attention. An adult is willing to recognize that his or her needs are not the most important things in the world. "When I was a child I used to think like a child, reason like a child, but when I became a man, I put aside childish things".

Love is kind. Picture yourself standing before St. Peter at the Gates of Heaven. He's just told you the good news that you are going in. Now, you're just waiting for the shuttle to pick you up. So, as you're waiting you ask him, Hey Pete – cause you are buddies now right, what was Jesus like during those years that you followed Him through Galilee and Judea?"

I am absolutely convinced that St. Peter would not say that Jesus was a great healer, a performer of wonderful miracles, nor would he say that Jesus' words were electrifying, they held us spell bound. Instead, I am absolutely convinced that St. Peter would say, "He was the kindest man to ever live." The tax collector Zaccheus, the woman caught in adultery, even Peter himself, were just a few that were embraced by the Lord's kindness.

He was kind. Love is kind, and He was Love Incarnate. He was kind, and the Kind One said to us, "Come, pick up your cross and follow me". By that He wasn't limiting us to accept our struggles in life. He was telling us to deal with all that life throws at us as He dealt with life, in complete kindness, in complete charity.

When I was a child..... We all have a lot of growing up to do to live as Christians. But that's OK, the Lord is not done with any of us yet.