

Some of you may recognize the name of Eli Wiesel, he was a renowned Jewish theologian and prolific author. In one story he remembers his family, living in Hungary during the dark days of the WWII. His family was waiting for their time to come, for the Nazis to arrive at their door and take them to labor camp.

He tells about a peasant woman by the name of Maria. Maria was almost like a member of the family. She was a Christian. During the early years of the war she continued to visit them, but eventually non-Jews were no longer allowed entrance to the ghettos. That did not deter Maria. She found her way through the barbed wire and she came anyway, bringing the Wiesels fruits, vegetables, and cheese.

One day she came knocking at their door. There was a cabin that she had up in the hills. She wanted to take the children, of which Eli was one, and hide them there before the SS came. They decided after much debate to stay together as a family, although they were deeply moved at this gesture. He writes of her:

Dear Maria. If other Christians had acted like her, the trains rolling toward the unknown would have been less crowded. But most thought only of themselves. A Jewish home was barely emptied of its inhabitants before they descended like vultures.

I think of Maria often, with affection and gratitude, he writes, and with wonder as well. This simple, uneducated woman stood taller than the city's intellectuals, dignitaries and clergy. My father had many acquaintances and even friends in the Christian community, not one of them showed the strength of character of this peasant woman.

Of what value was their faith, their education, their social position, if it did not arouse their love? It was a simple and devout Christian woman who saved the town's honor.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol. If I have prophetic powers and a faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give everything I have to the poor, but have not love, I am nothing.

Some years ago a popular song told us, "*What the world needs now is love, sweet love.*" St. Paul would totally agree with the main lines of the song. Many would argue that the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians is not merely the finest prose in St Paul's letters but possibly 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.

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. As Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, says, "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 how right that sounds!

Jesus is always patient and kind. He is never jealous. He is never boastful or conceited. He is never rude or selfish. Jesus does not take offense and is not resentful. Jesus 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. 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.?"** Simple 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 just instructing 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.

How do we do that? This is what St Francis of Assisi prayed and it's a good model for us:

Our Father, each day is a little life, each night a tiny death; help us to live with faith and hope and love. Lift our duty above drudgery; let not our strength fail, or the vision fade, in the heat and burden of the day. O God, make us patient and merciful one with another in the fret and jar of life, remembering that each fights a hard fight and walks a lonely way.

Forgive us, Lord, if we hurt our fellow souls; teach us a gentler tone, a sweeter charity of words, and a more healing touch.

Sustain us, O God, when we must face sorrow; give us courage for the day and hope for the morrow. Day unto day may we take hold of your hand and look up into your face, whatever happens, until our work is finished and the day is done. Amen.