

## **1 John 5:1-8 (John 15:9-17)**

In our Epistle and Gospel texts for today we hear the word *love* fourteen times and the word *command*, or *commandment*, eight times. This is no coincidence. These two words belong together. St. John puts it this way in our Epistle, “*This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.*” In our Gospel Jesus puts it like this, “*If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love.*”

Love and command belong together, and not just with God, but also with regard to human relationships. It cannot be said of a child, who refuses to obey what his parents command him, that he loves his parents, because love causes obedience within the child. This is why we see Jesus obeying His Father. He has love for His Father and so He obeys His commandments. This is how children are to love their parents; not because they are afraid of being punished if they disobey them, but having love for their parents, they desire to obey what is commanded of them.

Do you love God? There isn't one of us who would answer *No*. We would all say, “Yes, I love God.” But love and command belong together. If we love God, we will keep His commandments. Here's how St. James would put it, because he does with faith: “Don't tell me you love God; show me.”

We speak of love being in the heart, and yes, it is. But if it is there, it will be seen in other places. Loving God is not done with the heart. It's done with the body: with eyes and ears, with the mouth, with hands and feet. Do I love God? If I do, I will gladly, with my ears hear His words, for this is what He commands me. If I love God, I will respect His name with my mouth. If I love God, I will keep my eyes from looking at things that are sinful and lustful. Do I love God? Then with my hands I will show love to my neighbor and serve his needs. And if I love God, my feet will not run toward evil, but toward His holy house and holy supper. To say that I love God in my heart, but with my body to not love what He commands me is impossible. If my heart loves God, so will my eyes, my ears, my mouth, hands, and feet.

We need to hear this because this is how we think (at least it's how I, as a sinner think)... I do not need to repent as much as a lot of others because I love God and they don't; I have faith and they don't; Oh I don't love God perfectly, but it's close enough to what it should be; it's so much better than how others love Him.

If I think this way, or if you think this way, then it's not the love of God that is in our heart, but the love of ourself. And this shows in how we live. Remember that love and command go together. Whosever love is in my heart, that is the one I will obey. If I have love for God in my heart, I will keep His commandments with my eyes, ears, hands, and feet. But if I love myself more than God, I will live by my own set of rules and not His.

The truth hurts, but we must hear it. I need to repent as much as does the worst sinner out there. The one I love is the one I trust. Trusting in God, I desire to love Him above all things. But if I love myself, my family, or anyone else more than I love God, my trust is misplaced.

Friend, God does not love you less when your love for Him falls short. His love for you is not based on how much you love Him. If it was, He never would have died for you. He would have stopped short of the cross because we stop short of loving Him as we should.

We speak of God being in our heart; of His love dwelling there. Well and good. But how much better to say that you are in God's heart. This is the way that God first came to you. Not by way of your love for Him, and your obeying what He commands you; by way of His love for you and Jesus obeying His Father's command to deliver you from sin, death, and hell.

*"This is He,"* writes St. John, *"who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ.; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies...the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree."* Turn your eyes to Calvary. See the water and the blood coming out of Jesus' pierced side. John records this for us in his Gospel. He emphasizes the fact that the water and blood flowed from Jesus' dead corpse. Here in his Epistle John emphasizes that through the water and blood Jesus came to us. What water...what blood? The water of Baptism, the blood of the Sacrament. These are that which flowed from His side.

Jesus did not come to you and dwell within your heart because you love Him so, and because you obey His commandments. Jesus came to you, out of His heart full of love for you, through the gracious water of Holy Baptism. Jesus comes to you in the blood of the cup because for you He laid down His life.

This morning I stand here preaching to you, and you should know that the pulpit does not ever stand alone. It stands together with the font and with the altar. What you hear from the pulpit is always heard with the font and the altar in view. As John writes, *"These three agree...the Spirit and the water and the blood."* We cannot separate these. Christ is not divided. He is all three together. He comes to you in Spirit from the pulpit. He comes to you in water in the font. He comes to you in blood on the altar. Here is God's heart. Here is His love for you. Through pulpit, font, and altar...Spirit, water, and blood, Jesus opens His heart pouring out His grace upon you.

Your love and mine is a reflection of this. We had a full moon last Sunday night. As you know the moon has no light of its own. It's a piece of rock, nothing more. It has no source of light within itself. The only reason we can see the moon is because the sun shines on it. But it's not the light of the moon that we see; it's the light of the sun reflecting off the moon.

Just so, the light of God's Son, Jesus Christ, shines on you. How? Through the Spirit, the water, and the blood of Christ. This is how the Son's light comes to us, through Word and through Sacrament, and in no other way. And as the light of Christ shines on us, we reflect His light in how we live. Your love for God reflects His love for you. Moonlight is never as bright as sunlight. Our love is a paltry reflection of God's love. But it is a reflection nonetheless.

Now when the moon hides behind the earth, not as much sunlight is reflected. And when the moon is completely behind the earth, no sunlight whatsoever is reflected. That happens to us. We get so caught up in the world. We lose sight of Jesus because of our earthly pursuits. Our love for ourselves and for the things of this world blocks out the light of Christ. And we become quarter moons, crescent moons, or moons reflecting no light at all.

But friend, even when the moon is dark, the sun is still shining. It never gets dark. God's love for you never ceases. The Spirit, water, and blood are always crying out to you that you are God's child; you are His forgiven one; your sins are washed away. God beholds you in love, and nothing can ever change that. Amen.