

*In the Gospel reading from the 15th chapter of St. John's Gospel, we have the words of Jesus to his disciples as they left the upper room and made their way through the vineyards to the garden of Gethsemane. As Jesus looks at the vines surrounding them, he speaks about our relationship to him and our relationship to others.*

*The Lord speaks first about our relationship with Him. "I am the vine, you are the branches." It was last Sunday's Gospel. This is our first priority, the core of our life as Christians. We are *in* Jesus and he is *in* us.*

*+A father writes of a children's understanding of this: "Our friend's seven-year-old daughter told her three-year-old sister that she had found Jesus and that she had hidden him in her heart. The younger daughter later told her mother that she also had found Jesus and that she hid him under the bed." It is only when he abides in us and we in him, can we truly love as he asks us to love.*

*Today's reading speaks about our relationships with others. Jesus says, "Love one another as I have loved you." How can the Lord command us to love? Doesn't love simply happen? Don't we "fall in love"?*

*This command of the Lord can sound rather puzzling if we only identify love, as many people do today, with feeling. We cannot command a feeling. We don't choose our feelings for today or plan our feelings for tomorrow.*

*+Just put the movie *Titanic* on for those who have not seen it to see how much control one has over their feelings. (Or *Marley & Me* for dog owners.)*

*Feeling is about "liking" someone and that is not entirely under our control.*

*Hence, the Lord is not commanding us to "like" everyone. Real love, Christ's kind of love, is not a feeling but an act of the will, a decision, a commitment to act for the benefit of another no matter how we feel about that individual.*

*Here, the Lord is commanding us to love others, even those we don't particularly like.*

*Christian love is a decision, a commitment to do whatever will serve a person's spiritual benefit, whether we like that individual or not.*

*The confusion of loving and liking causes many problems today. If we identify married love with romance (a feeling), is that a realistic basis for a lifelong marriage?*

*+Valeri Runyan wrote this in *Readers Digest*: Soon after our last child left home for college, my husband was resting next to me on the couch with his head in my lap. I carefully removed his glasses. "You know, honey," I said sweetly, "without your glasses you look like the same handsome young man I married." "Honey," he replied with a grin, "without my glasses, you still look pretty good too!"*

*Is the degree of emotional attraction between two people a guarantee of fidelity? Can anybody guarantee or predict how they will feel tomorrow? Are we willing to base our life on another's feeling?*

*It is like trying to build a house on cotton. When feelings start to change, does that mean that the relationship is at an end?*

*Or could that signal the beginning of a new, more mature and honest relationship? It is like when someone dates another. At first this is, "My dream come true!" But there comes a time when you notice the warts and the relationship either ends or it moves to something deeper.*

*If we find our spiritual life a bit dry, it may be the Lord wants us to move to something deeper. Look into the lives of the saints, Mother Teresa, in particular. One cannot sustain the emotional high of that first Easter Vigil as a Christian.*

*Jesus is calling us to a more mature commitment that is not dependent on emotion. If we love only people we like, Jesus asks: How is that deserving of praise? How is that love distinctively Christian? Even the worst of Pharisees loved those they liked.*

*If we wait for some people to become agreeable or likeable, we might wait forever.*

*When we struggle with loving another person who irritates us, we might look to our Lord. Yes, he was angry with certain people, perturbed, but he loved them. He asked to love as he loved on the way to his crucifixion. We are all God's children, no matter what we may have done with our lives. He loves all of us. A loving parent loves their children because they are their children, not for what they do or don't do.*

*If we read today's Gospel by seeing love as a decision, a commitment and a mission, a new world of Christ-like living opens up for us. In a time when people are governed so much by emotion and passion, the Gospel calls Jesus' followers to something more realistic, more mature and more beneficial — to care about the spiritual well-being of others whether we like them or not.*

*This kind of love has great power to transform our world and great power to transform us.*

*Jesus summons us to love. It is not to a sentimental love but a heroic one. That heroism can take many forms. There is a married person caring for a spouse with Alzheimer's disease. To love the one whom despises us, to love the one who makes us feel small, as they did Christ in his humiliation in the journey to the cross. That is heroic love.*

*Today's Gospel reading contains one verse that is the key to genuine holiness, to entering the very life, mind and work of Christ, to understanding what real love is.*

*It is when Jesus, on His way through the vines to Gethsemane, says that we should love one another as he loves us. That is a mission that can fill and fulfill a lifetime.*