

Four ways to fulfill our mission to love like Christ



Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (Jn 13:34). Most of us are familiar with this verse. Unfortunately, in spite of this

familiarity, we unconsciously live in near-constant defiance of this commandment, clinging instead to deeply flawed, all-too-human understandings of what it means to love and be loved.

Of course, each and every one of us was created with a deep well of love inside. Each of us has an almost unquenchable longing to be loved and a desire to love. Unfortunately, despite all this, we struggle to love in ways that are actually loving. In fact, that’s basically what sin is. Loving (ourselves or others) in ways that aren’t.

In his *Theology of the Body*, St. John Paul argued that sin, essentially, is a fundamental corruption of our ability to give and receive love in ways that are actually loving. I want to love you, but despite my best attempts, I hurt you. I diminish you. I use you. Even without meaning to, and often without knowing it. Similarly, I want to be loved, but despite my deepest longings, I allow you to hurt me, diminish me and use me.

The fact is, as much as we desperately long to love and be loved, original sin robbed us of any clue of how to do it well. Christ came to fix that. He gives us his example to follow and his grace to sustain us. Christians follow Christ because we understand that, left to our own devices, and despite our best intentions, we will make a hash out of love every time. It’s only by following Christ that we can hope to

learn to love in ways that are actually loving, in ways we were created to love at the beginning of time before sin made us forget how.

When Jesus said, "love one another," he said that it was a new commandment. But why was it new? Did people really believe that they were unloving before? Hasn't every person throughout all time thought of themselves as a paragon of love even when standing in the middle of the wreckage they created through their own best attempts to love "in their own way"?

Jesus' commandment was new because he was asking us to stop pursuing our own doomed attempt to love on our own power. Instead, he calls us, his disciples, to spend our lives following him and learning to love like God. "Love one another as I have loved you" (and not as you naturally wish to love and be loved in your confused, broken state).

So, how does God love us? How do we love like him?

1. God made us in his image and likeness. He gives us his dignity. We love like God when we defend and uphold each other's innate dignity as children of God regardless of what we look like or what we've done.

2. God gives us life. He provides every breath we draw. We love like God when we unfailingly defend our own and other's right to life from conception to natural death.

3. God gave us bodies. Although sin has made our bodies corruptible, God loves our bodies so much that he intends to resurrect them, glorify them and unite us with them for all eternity. We love like God when we promote each other's health and well-being and when we live and love in a manner that respects our bodies' godly design.

4. God gave us hopes, dreams and a unique charism and mission. When we bring our deepest longings to God, he teaches us how to fulfill them in ways that are pleasing to him and

satisfying for us. We love like God when we help each other find faithful ways to foster the hopes, dreams, charism and mission that God has placed on our hearts.

In [this series of columns](#), I'm exploring what it means to be pastoral. Every Christian is called to be pastoral. Not just pastors and professional ministers, but Christian parents, politicians and anyone attempting to use their gifts to build the kingdom of God.

At heart, being pastoral means shepherding each other through the process of surrendering our broken, human assumptions of what it means to love and be loved, and choosing to embrace the new vision of love God reveals to us both through his own example and the teachings of his Church.

Christians fulfill the call to be pastoral by refusing to perpetuate – or worse, enable – worldly visions of love, and instead by challenging and supporting each other in living Christ's new commandment to love one another gracefully.

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