

Easter 6.09

A woman recently told me a story about her mother Joan and her mother's friend, Jane. One day when her mother Joan was helping her friend Jane sort through some old things in her house, she came upon a pair of antique lamps. They were very dirty but Joan fell in love with them. When she asked Jane what she was going to do with them, Jane said she was going to throw them away even though they had belonged to her mother. Joan asked Jane if she could have them and Jane agreed. Joan took them home and worked on them to clean them up. Then she placed them on her dining room buffet. Months later Joan invited Jane for dinner and Jane noticed the beautiful lamps on Joan's buffet. "Where did you get them?" Jane asked. "You gave them to me," Joan told her. The next morning Jane called Joan and told her that the lamps had been her mother's and she wanted them back. Joan's daughter had never particularly like Jane, but now she liked her even less. "She gave you the lamps," Joan's daughter said, "and they were filthy when you received them. They belong to you now." But Joan wrapped them up and returned them to her friend Jane. Years later Joan's daughter reflected on what her mother had taught her by her action. She had taught her that friends are more important than lamps. If Joan had refused to return the lamps to Jane, their long-term

friendship would have been over. Because she valued Jane's friendship more than the lamps, she returned them to Jane. And that was a lesson for her daughter.

How are our values? Do we value our possessions more than we value our friends? If we do our priorities are false, for friends are more important than things. And if we cannot accede at times to the demands of our friends, then maybe we don't really love them. Maybe we just love ourselves. Maybe we use them instead of loving them.

In our world today we see very often the false values which some people have. They will do practically anything in order to accumulate wealth and fame. Greed has been behind the economic crisis now existing. And behind the greed is a desire for self-aggrandizement, and behind that is the root of all sin, pride or self-love.

St Ignatius wrote that there are two leaders in the world and they have very different standards. One leader is called Satan and he tries to enlist people into his service by tempting them first of all to wealth, then to vain honor (fame or prestige, we call it today), and finally to great pride or self-love. The other leader is Jesus and he

calls people first to poverty (spiritual and sometimes even actual poverty), then to a desire to be unnoticed and thought unimportant, and through that to humility. So the standards of the two leaders are diametrically opposed. Today we see that Satan's standards are flourishing.

Today's second reading from John's First Letter and then the Gospel from John's Gospel are full of love. Look at that second sentence from the second reading: "Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love." Then it goes on to say: "In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins." And what does love mean concretely for John? It means that God has acted on our behalf by sending his son to help us. Then in the Gospel Jesus sets up a chain of love. The Father has loved him. Now he loves us, and now he asks us to love one another. And just as the Father's love and Jesus' love showed itself in action, so we too are asked to show our love by keeping his commandments. But the only commandment mentioned is that of love: love one another.

So let us try to walk in love. We have to do that first at home with our families. Then we have to do it in society. And then we have the hardest saying of Jesus: "...if you love those who love you,

what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?” No, Jesus says. We must be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect And so he teaches us: “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and unjust” (Mat 5: 44-45).

In short, all our relationships are to be conducted in love. And what does love mean when the people are not friends but simply people we meet in business or in the ordinary interchanges of life? It means courtesy and respect and justice. Courtesy for all, respect for all. Not a false intimacy, but on the other hand not a bold brashness. And justice. How different our world would look if business people and politicians were honest and just in their dealings with each other and with us. I wonder too if the way we drive our cars is courteous, respectful and just. And do we handle the poor with the same respect with which we handle the well-off? Remember that section from James’ Letter in which he warns the congregation about this: “For if a man with gold rings on his fingers and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in, and you pay attention to

the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Sit here, please,’ while you say to the poor one, ‘Stand there’ or ‘Sit at my feet,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil designs?” (James 2:2-4).

If we can behave towards all with love, that is, with courtesy, respect and justice, our light is going to shine for all the world to see, and we will be making our effort to place our world more under the standard of the Lord Jesus rather than that of Satan. Again, as John teaches us today: “Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.”