

Fifth Sunday of Easter – Cycle C
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – May 19, 2019
Reverend Robert W. Marshall, Jr., Pastor

When was the last time you used “Ask Jeeves”? Or searched for something on Lycos or AltaVista or even Yahoo? The truth is that we no longer choose among search engines. When we want an answer, we just Google it. What was once just one more search engine among others has now become so synonymous with the process that it is a substitute for the verb “to search.” Yes, at times, Google is your friend. You just type in a name or a topic and you are flooded with websites that mention the words. Now the websites are not ranked in terms of value, mind you, but based upon advertising revenues or frequency of visits or any number of other factors that may easily lead one astray. Still, Google serves its purpose. They help us find needles in the haystacks of the internet even if they give us a lot of dull or broken or contaminated needles in the process.

I suppose you could actually Google today’s gospel passage on line. But you’d have to be careful how you searched. Obviously, Jesus’ central message is one of love – but I’d advise against just typing in the word “love” and clicking search. Oh, you’d probably get this passage all right, along with hundreds of thousands of other websites that have very little to do with God. Love, as our internet search would show us, is a word often used in our society, but rarely understood. In contemporary culture, love is too often reduced to the physical, to the temporary, to the ordinary. Today’s world sees love in terms of self-interest, as something to be accumulated and enjoyed and only occasionally shared. Rather than lifting us toward God, our society often uses the word “love” to drag us down, to make us common. That’s clearly not what Jesus was talking about.

When we hear Jesus inviting us to love one another, we are tempted to listen with the ears of our culture. We are tempted to think of Jesus’ words as a call to satisfy our desires through the eyes of another, to seek pleasure without regard to the consequences. But this temptation certainly misses the point. Jesus challenges his disciples to love one another not as those who seek only their own pleasure, but rather to love one another as he has loved us. Now there’s the challenge. You see, Jesus didn’t love as the world beckons us to love. He didn’t love us selfishly as we often do. He didn’t love us as a means to an end. Unlike us, Jesus didn’t view love for what he could get out of it. No, Jesus’ love is perfect, self-emptying, completely directed toward us. The most perfect reminder of Christ’s love for us is not in some sappy card or romantic movie or questionable website. No, we are reminded of the perfect love of Christ each time we gaze at the crucifix and each

time we gather to celebrate the Eucharist. Jesus reveals his passionate love for us in his suffering and death, when he nourishes us with his body and blood, when he reconciles us to the Father. If Jesus had been seeking only his own self-interest, he would have never taken on human flesh, never made that walk to Calvary, never stretched out his arms on the cross for us. In every way, Jesus reveals his perfect love to us and invites us to make our love like his – selfless, sacrificial, completely directed toward God and toward others.

May is a month of family gatherings – for Mothers’ Day and graduations and weddings. Families remind us of what love means – at least we hope that they do. In actuality, of course, our families are just as fragile and human, just as sometimes selfless and sometimes selfish as we are. Families call us to unconditional love, to self-giving love, to sacrificial love. And the love of a parent for a child, the love of spouses, the love of siblings or friends is as close as we humans may come to a pure love, a perfect love – except, of course, for the love of Christ himself. You see, our love for God may well be conditional – his love for us never is. Our love for God may be with an avaricious eye to gaining heaven. His love for us is expressed in complete surrender. In this Easter season, as we continue to rejoice and give thanks for the power and the promise of the Resurrection, may we remember that Easter would have never happened without the love expressed in the Incarnation, without the self-giving love of the Last Supper, without the self-emptying love of the cross. A simple Google search will show us that our human version of love is often a far cry from the Christ-like love that welcomes all and excludes no one. If our status as a disciple is to be demonstrated – measured, if you will – by the extent of our love, well, all of us, I suspect, need to work on that. The good news is that each time we gather at this table, each time Christ offers his very Body and Blood to us as our nourishment, we get one more example to follow, one more lesson in the love we are invited to embrace and share. May we – day by day – grow to love one another as Christ has loved us.