

**Fifth Sunday of Easter – Year C
(May 6, 2007)**

As I Have Loved You

I recently read about a Muslim teacher who made the following statement at an inter-faith gathering. He said, “Islam is a religion of faith; Judaism is a religion of hope; Christianity is a religion of love.”

Well that might be a bit of an oversimplification. We’d like to think, I’m sure, that Christianity is a religion of all three: faith, hope, and love. On the other hand the Muslim teacher might have caught something Jesus said to his disciples. We heard it just now in our Gospel passage. “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” He even went so far as to say, “Love one another as I have loved you” – as I have loved you. That goes beyond that other commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus loved us to death – literally. He died on the cross out of love for us and to show us how much God loves us all, so if we are to love one another as Jesus loved us, that means we must be willing to die for one another. Now that’s an awful lot to ask of us. And maybe we are tempted to throw our hands up in despair and say, “Who can do that?”

My own reaction is this: if Jesus asked us to do it, that means it is possible to do it. God never asks more of us than we can actually accomplish. But there are times when what God asks of us seems very, very difficult – and this is one of them.

But then on the other hand think what an extraordinary world this would be if only those of us who call ourselves Christians could live this way. It would begin to seem like paradise.

So, what to do? Well, the first thing to do is what we are doing right now. We are here at the Eucharist. Here we receive the bread of life and the cup of salvation. We feast on the one bread and the one cup that make us the one body of Christ. St. Augustine said it well many years ago. When you come to the altar, the priest says, “The body of Christ.” And you answer “Amen.”

But when you say “Amen” it is not just to what you receive but also to

what you are: the Body of Christ. That's really awesome. And if indeed we are the body of Christ then we must act like Christ. And that means being willing to die for one another – loving one another as he has loved us.