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## **Christ, Lover of Mankind 2020**

### *Hebrews 2:11-18 & John 3:13-17*

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When the Church calls God the "lover of mankind," the feast we celebrate today, she upholds a vital truth about humanity. God loves us more than we can imagine. When God made humans, He made us incapable of terminating that love. Nothing can destroy that love since He formed us as a replica of God's image.

In Holy Scripture, He describes Himself as a bridegroom rejoicing over a bride, who is the apple of his eye. (Isaiah 62:5) He speaks of himself as a father who celebrates the return of a faithless son, in whom he recognizes his image. These words justify the beautiful description of Him by which Holy Church addresses God as a philanthropist.

One of the hardest lessons for us to learn, and one of the easiest lessons to forget, is that God loves us. That is because we are dealing with a difficult subject. St. Paul tells us that the love of Christ surpasses knowledge. (Ephesians 3:19) It means we will never comprehend His love for us entirely. But if we are to understand it a little better, we must break it down into dimensions.

First, we might understand the love of God by its length. God's love is eternal, from everlasting to everlasting; and if we leave out this dimension, we will never be able to comprehend it fully. There are so many things in our world that seem to contradict the concept of a God who cares.

Oscar Wilde once said, "There is enough misery on any one street in London to disprove the theory of a loving, benevolent deity." We live in a world of beautiful sunsets, lovely flowers, laughing children, and singing birds. But we also live in a world of war and disease, natural catastrophe, racism discrimination and social injustice. That first example speaks to us of a God of love, but that second list sometimes thunders so loudly that it drowns the voice of the first list. In a moment of cynicism, Thomas Carlyle looked at all the world's miseries and said, "God sits in heaven and does nothing."

Well, human suffering is a reality we cannot deny and dare not ignore. Since the beginning of time, philosophers, preachers, and teachers have tried to understand it and tried to explain it with minimal success. No one comprehends all the apparent contradictions of life. Maybe part of the problem is not only the human misery that exists but the limitation of the human mind.

We see life in such small segments making it virtually impossible for us to fit the pieces together and get the whole picture. When life goes wrong, when your dreams shatter, when your heart breaks, that seems for the moment to be the entire story. But as you move away from that experience and look back upon it from a higher hill, you may see it in a different light.

In the Old Testament, the story of Joseph is a classic example of this very thing. Hated by his brothers, sold into slavery, unjustly thrown into prison - his entire early life was a tale of tragedy. But Joseph waited until all the numbers were in and the totals had been run, then he explained it to his brothers like this: "You meant it to me for evil, but God meant it to me for good." (Genesis 50:20)

What God expects of you and me is essentially what a wise earthly father expects of his children - love and trust that does not demand or require complete understanding. His love is eternal, and we will never comprehend it if we leave out that dimension.

Here we are inclined toward one of two mistakes. Some would make God's love too narrow. This restricted love was a big problem for the Jews in New Testament times. They wanted a God who would love them and no one else. He tried to stretch their minds beyond that point, but they would not hear Him; finally, He had to go on without them.

And we still have difficulty believing that all people are God's children and that He cares just as much for others as he does for us. If we ever understand that concept, it will change our attitude and action toward those who differ from us.

Many Canadians who are watching the riots in parts of the United States are shocked and horrified by it. Still, Canada also has problems with Racism and have taken to the streets in solidarity. "Racism exists in Canada. Anti-Black Racism exists in Canada. Police brutality exists in Canada," Indigenous Racism exists in Canada. Anti-Semitic Racism exists in Canada. Why can't we learn God loves us all regardless of skin colour or ethnic background?

But some think of God's love in too broad and general terms. They believe that God may love the world, but they have trouble believing that God loves them. This inclusive love is one of the essential messages of the New Testament - that God cares about everyone. He knows your name, where you live, where you work, everything about you, and loves you. If we ever accept that, it will make a drastic difference in our outlook on life.

The vertical dimension of divine love means that God's love has moral fibre. It is not a weak, sentimental affection. Some parents think they love their children when they give them everything they want. God is far too wise a Father ever to do that to His children. Instead of making life easy, He wants us to become strong. Instead of giving us everything our little heart's desire, He wants us to become unselfish and learn to share. God is the Father who loves his children so much He cares what we are and how we live. So, in these difficult days with all the civil unrest midst the Covid-19 pandemic, pray that we might understand the length, the breadth, the depth, the height and know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge.

Today we pay tribute to all the wonderful fathers in the parish. May God bless you, keep you and help you in the task, the mission assigned by God, who will reward you at His will and in His own time.

Amen!