

Owe only love. Sermon. Fr. Hugh St. George.  
Romans 13:8-14. Pentecost 12. Pr 18. 9/4/2011.

An attractive mature woman commissioned a young artist to paint her portrait.

Wearing a lovely dress and looking dignified, she posed for her portrait sitting in a chair.

She said to the artist, "Now, young man, I want you to paint me wearing a beautiful diamond necklace, and a three carat diamond ring, and a large and beautiful ruby brooch. Oh yes, and a couple of diamond bracelets too."

When she sat for the next sitting, he said:

"I can't help but be curious about your jewelry. I mean you don't have any jewelry on."

She said, "Yes, I know that. But if I die first, I am sure that my husband will marry again.

I want his next wife to go crazy looking everywhere trying to find all my jewelry."

"Owe no one anything, except to love one another." This is what St. Paul tells us in today's passage from his Letter to the Romans:

"Owe no one anything, except to love one another."

Actively spread Christian love, the very essence of our faith. This is what it's all about.

Everything else in life is secondary.

If we succeed at this, we have done everything.

If we fail in this, we have done nothing.

This powerful force of Christian love, does not originate with us. It started with God.

We can love because He loved us first.

It was in order to share divine love that the Creator launched the cosmos and formed the human race.

It was love that brought Heaven to earth through Jesus Christ. It was love that caused Him to sacrifice His life for all who believe in Him.

It was God's love that ignited the spark for the resurrection of Jesus, and so opened up the possibility of eternal life in Heaven for us all.

This divine love consumed the first disciples.  
It is love that is the continuing inspiration,  
motivation and driving force for all His  
followers, including us today.

Love still lights up human hearts and it is our  
job to express His love in our lives.

Whatever other responsibilities we have, love is  
the first responsibility and love is the last one.

God is sovereign, the ruler of Love, and His  
message changes us into His likeness.

Responding to His message of love restores us  
into His image, makes us into His likeness,  
makes our lives here meaningful, and prepares  
us to be worthy to be with Him for eternity.

This divine love is the source of any love we get to experience or express.

And our calling as Christian people is to serve as the agents of this love.

This is it. The true bottom line of life, worthy of all our best efforts. To serve as agents of God's love is what we have been put here to do.

Now some people you know must be God's secret agents, because it's awfully hard to see love in their behavior.

Opportunities for expressing love continually appear to us in life's daily interactions as we move among the people we know.

But our opportunities to love also extend beyond our immediate day to day interactions.

We can strive to extend God's love among people we barely know, even among people we will never meet here on earth.

We can work for right relationships to prevail among disparate groups and people in any sphere we can connect to. Divine love wants to work through us to establish justice and peace everywhere, creating a network of right relationships which the Bible calls Shalom.

No person really lives until they live and move in the flow of God's love.

The Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross tells us that, "In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone." At the end of the day, we will not be judged on success, or wealth, or knowledge, or anything else the world values.

We will be judged simply on love.

At life's end, love will be the deciding criterion.

When God measures someone, He measures the size of their heart, not the size of their head, nor the size of their wealth.

This absolute priority of love is a challenge to us, and at the same time it also sets us free.

Love is the first and foremost Christian grace.  
This one thing we always owe to one another.  
And this requires that as God's Church, we must  
be a community that is continually learning to be  
in the flow of love.

There is much in this world that works directly  
against the spread of love.

Individual hearts, friendships, relationships and  
communities can all become infected with anti-  
love. So love in action must often perform the  
healing of damaged relationships.

We cannot pretend that clashes and conflicts  
don't occur. Neither should we keep them alive  
and fan the flames of hurt.

There is always a better alternative to living with anger or resentment.

That alternative is to resolve whatever conflicts we have with one another. We can make this happen. It's called reconciliation.

When we endeavor to reconcile with people, we create the opening for God's love to enter the picture and do something wonderful, liberating and healing.

There is a tremendous amount for anybody to learn in the great schools and universities available in our society.

Yet the Church stands as a unique and noble school, because here and only here, we commit ourselves to learning together how to love in a Christ-like way.

Learning to love is lifelong learning. We never complete it, at least not this side of the hereafter. We are always still basically beginners in love. And it's never too late to make a fresh beginning

All of us have been deeply hurt at some time, and all of us, even inadvertently have caused hurt to someone else.

Especially if you've been hurt, or let down, there is a way forward, to begin again the exercise of expressing and experiencing love, under the power of the Christ.

God is love. He created us in His image, which is love. So ultimately the very essence of who we are is love. God is love. You are love.

As I look around our church, I ask each of us, with whatever portion of life lies ahead of us, to take part in the grandest experiment of all, which is learning how to love after the example of Jesus Christ.

May each one of us commit ourselves afresh, as Christians, to practicing this same love.

Then, imperfect though we are, we can become what God would have us be: agents of divine love, lights to the world, right here in our place, right now in our time.

I would like to now pray this prayer from our  
Book of Common Prayer:

"O Lord, you have taught us that without love,  
whatever we do is worth nothing:  
Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts  
your greatest gift, which is love,  
the true bond of peace and of all virtue,  
without which whoever lives  
is accounted dead before you.

Grant this for the sake of your only Son  
Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you  
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever.

Amen."