

## “Love” - 30 Sunday (A)

Ages ago, very early on in the year, I shared with you that a friend, who is a management consultant, visited me in the parish to discuss how I could better organise myself. Part of the homework she left me was to read a book entitled *Eat that Frog!* One of its suggestions for maximising your time is to make a list of what you have to do, prioritising what is most important and necessary. And I have been generally doing this; most days I write out what needs to be done so I remain focused and somewhat organised. But the most important thing I have never written down yet if I had any sense I would stick post-its on the shaving mirror, on the kitchen table and on the steering wheel of the car, with these three words of today’s Gospel scrawled on them: ‘You must love.’

Like most people, though sadly not all, I first learned about love in the family home. I was treated with love, out of love. This meant that I walked tall because nothing makes you more confident about yourself than being loved. And having received love, I was able to love in return.

At school, my lesson in love continued through friendships where I discovered love’s excitement; you see this in any child who is always going on and on about what a particular friend says or does. It is in friendships freely chosen that we continue to grow in the art of love. With our families, it generally doesn’t matter what we do - they love us still - but with friends we have to practice love and get better at it. We have to learn to be unselfish and considerate.

And then, next, romantic love may come. We fall in love with someone and, if we have any humility, we marvel at the love itself: How is it that this love has happened? And, more extraordinarily: Why on earth do they love me? At this moment we discover something new about love: ultimately, it cannot be earned. It is sheer gift and must be celebrated. And as time goes on the couple hopefully learn this lesson: love needs to be nurtured - the couple must purify themselves of egotism and lust and become more kind and forgiving.

Life’s lessons in love mirror what Jesus teaches today: ‘You must love.’ For a human being to be fully alive, they must know they are loved and they must love in return. Now not all of us may have been blessed by a loving family or by friends or by the romantic love for someone in particular but our need to love, and grow in love, remains. Our hearts can expand infinitely; the only barrier to love is our own unwillingness to love. So thank God for all the opportunities around us. We may be walking through the centre of Brightlingsea or down the High St of Wivenhoe but this remains true wherever we are: every person who walks past us, because they are willed by God, because they are his children, is our neighbour, our sister and our brother. And, however, we may feel - shy, distant, not interested - that person on the path with us has an absolute right to our love.

And we shall never understand ourselves, and we shall never become what we could be, without loving God because it is He who willed us out of love and sustains us in love. He is love itself; from him comes the gift of love. We must love God with all our heart because we need to have feelings for him. We must love God with all our soul because our soul is eternal and we are made for eternal life with God. We must love God with all our strength because to love someone else is a choice that you have to work at. Go on, put it on a post-it: ‘We must love.’