

9.30 a.m.

St Columba

14th February 2021

Valentines Day Sermon

TEXTS: John 21: 15 - 25

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the 14th February – Valentines Day. I wonder how many of you have received Valentine Cards. Do you remember the silly rhymes you would put on the envelope when you were sending a card to your loved one?

Postie, Postie, don't be slow

Be like Elvis, Go man Go

Roses are red, Violets are blue

Honey is sweet and so are you

Postie, Postie do your stuff

Take this to my wee cream puff

There are millions of them and they are all banal. I think the best rhyme to write on a card comes from Burns,

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass, So deep in love am I

And I will love thee still my dear, Till a' the seas gang dry

Till a' the seas gang dry my dear and the rocks melt wi' the sun

O I will love thee still my dear while the sands o' life shall run

These are magical, magical words.

Perhaps you know how it all began. Valentine Day started in the time of the Roman Empire. In the 3rd Century Claudius was Emperor and he engaged in many bloody and unpopular campaigns. Because of this he was having difficulty in getting soldiers to serve in his armies. He believed that men did not want to

leave their wives and families. So he cancelled all marriages and engagements in Rome. He didn't allow any more marriages.

VALENTINE was a priest and he enjoyed marrying young couples and he kept on doing so but in secret. He was caught, put in jail and condemned to death. He got to know the daughter of one of the prison guards and they spent many hours talking together. On the day he was to be executed, he left a note for her and signed it "Love from your Valentine" – that was on 14th February 269 and that was the beginning of people sending love messages to one another.

Let me tell you another terrible joke – it must have come from a cracker;

What did the French Chef give to his wife on Valentine's Day - a hug and a quiche !!

Dreadful, is it not.

As I have already said, Valentine's Day should be all about love and that led me to choose the particular passage from John's Gospel where Jesus confronted Peter by asking him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than all else?" Jesus appearing not to be content with Peter's answer, asked the question no less than three times. It must have been distressing for Peter to have the question asked so often. Let me give you a little background. After the Crucifixion and Resurrection, at Lake Tiberius, some of the disciples had gathered together and Simon Peter said to the others, "I am going fishing" That is what he did and the rest joined him on the boat. They were out all night and did not catch a thing. Jesus was standing at the water's edge, although the disciples did not know it was Him. He urged them to cast their net out on the other side of the boat and upon doing so caught so many fish that they could not haul the net aboard. John then said to Peter, "It is the Lord" and when Peter realized it was Jesus he jumped into the Lake and swam ashore, and afterwards asked Peter if he loved him.

Prof. Barclay in writing about this passage says "It may be that Jesus swept his hand around the boat and its nets and equipment and catch of fish, and said to Peter, Do you love me more than these things. Are you prepared to give them all up, to abandon all hope of a successful career, to give yourself to my people

and to my work?" This could be a career defining moment for Peter. Was Jesus really saying, "One day I called you – you responded, you rose up, left all and followed me. Now you are back to your old life again. Are you going to abandon me?" Peter replied, as we know to Jesus question, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you".

What more could he have said? If Jesus had really challenged him he had little evidence of his affection to put forward. He had failed him, denied him, deserted him, and had not forgotten that he had done so. And yet, although it may not have looked like it, although he could not prove it, though many things rose up to mock the claim, he knew he did love Christ in spite of everything, and so when asked for the third time, he answered, "You know", and then in a kind of desperation, "You who knows all things must know this – that I love you."

And when you think of it, what other plea has any of us? We too, have failed and faltered and deserted Jesus. And yet we also can protest that in spite of much, which we do not deny seem to make our claim ridiculous, we do love Him, and He knows it.

And what did Peter's love bring him? It brought him a task. "If you love me, Jesus said, "then feed my sheep" In other words, give your life to shepherding the lambs and sheep of my flock.

We can only prove our love for Jesus by doing what He asks and that means loving others as we love ourselves. Love is one of the greatest privileges in the world but it involves sacrifice. It brought Peter a cross. Love brought Peter a task and a cross.

I sometimes wonder if we pay enough for our faith. In no way am I talking about money. When we look out and see what others are doing or have done – how they sacrifice, it does make you wonder. Do we do enough? How often do we put ourselves out? Do we ever do anything special, which in some way may cost us – which is hard for us to do? You see, if we never put ourselves out, never make a special effort, if we just go on doing what we would probably have been doing anyway, what does that say about our love and our faith?

You know, the main enemy which Christ has, is not atheism, of agnosticism or cynicism or any other –ism for that matter. It is apathy. Most people are not anti-God or anti-religion. They probably don't think about God or Religion – they don't see it as relevant, and could not care less about it. They cannot see their lives being any better if they joined the church or professed and practiced a faith. Do you think that one of the reasons could be the example offered by us. If we are as greedy as the next man; if we indulge in malicious gossip; if we do not help our neighbour in need; if we are only concerned with our own standard of living; if we do nothing or very little for others, then small wonder that those outside the fold of the church do not bother very much about it. When we profess our love for Jesus, and for it to be real and meaningful, then we must show something of that love in our lives. Should we not all regularly ask ourselves the question, "What am I doing for Christ". Opportunities abound and we do not need to take our soap box with us, but we must show to the world that in some way we are different – that we are prepared to give and not to count the cost; that we have a quality of life that is to be desired.

Today, Jesus is asking us the same question that He put to Peter, "Do YOU love me?" I am sure that in spite of our many failings, our answer will be "Yes". Let us show our love, and prove it, by what we do and how we act.