

To God Alone Be The Glory

I hope you are a thinker. You might be the kind of thinker who pauses to ponder an idea. Or you might be the kind of thinker who doesn't need quiet time but notices wisdom as you're flying through your day. Here's what I mean. Today is Mother's Day. It's well and good to call or visit your mom on Mother's Day, give her a gift, serve her a special meal, present her with a card that expresses how you feel about her. If you're a thinker, you might notice that Mother's Day is a doorway into thinking more deeply about love. How might you treat your mother well all year long? If your mother has left this earthly life, perhaps you think about ways you can honor your mother by how you treat all the women in your life. Or maybe you notice that the important women in your life greatly appreciate when you take the time to listen and interact with them, that your tone of voice communicates at least as much as the words you choose to say.

It's good to be a thinker. Jesus seems to be reaching out to all thinkers by the words of today's Gospel. Think about which day this was for Jesus. Not Mother's Day. President Wilson wouldn't declare this a national holiday until 1914. No, for Jesus it was the night before his death on the cross for us. He was celebrating the Passover with his disciples and instituting Holy

Communion and preparing them for his death, his resurrection, and his ascension. At this point in his final Ted Talk, Jesus is giving some lengthy instructions in hopes that they will **REMEMBER THESE LESSONS ON LOVE.**

In today's Gospel Jesus seems to be reaching out to all thinkers when he says: ¹⁵*If you love me, you will obey what I command.* In our society people say things like this in order to manipulate others. Some children say to their parents, "If you love me, you'll let me stay overnight at my friend's home." Some people test the strength of their relationship by saying, "If you love me, you'll buy this for me." Hopefully you recognize this kind of talk as manipulation. It pits your love against their selfishness. But Jesus isn't trying to manipulate anyone. He's just stating a fact. If you love me, you will obey what I command. If it's raining, the sidewalk will be wet. If you start a fire, it will feel hot. If you breathe, you will live. If you love me, you will obey what I command. That's the first lesson on love: love goes beyond the words "I love you, Jesus." Those who love Jesus think about their attitudes and words and actions as ways to demonstrate their love for their Savior. As they hear the good news of God's love for them again and again and it sinks down deep into their heart, they come to cherish the commands of Jesus as a dear treasure.

They take time to review the teachings of the one who loved them so much that he gave up his life to save theirs eternally. Love Jesus, dear friends. Love his commands. Obey them with a happy heart. This honors God. It results in blessings for you. It makes interacting with you more pleasant for everyone in your life.

Jesus knows that those who obey his commands tend to stay out of trouble. He's trying to help us enjoy our best possible life. That's why he didn't just give us his commands; he attaches a wonderful promise to his statement. Picking up Jesus' words: *...you will obey what I command.* ¹⁶*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—* ¹⁷*the Spirit of truth.* As I mentioned, Jesus was about to leave his disciples. But think beyond his death tomorrow on the first Good Friday. Jesus would rise in three days. Then he would show himself alive to his disciples for 40 days. Then he would ascend to heaven. That's when Jesus would leave them in such a way that they wouldn't see him with their eyes anymore. After three years of togetherness with him, Jesus didn't want them to be afraid or to say things like, "Well, Jesus sure turned out to be a big disappointment. Let's give up on organized religion." No, Jesus says, if you love me, you will treasure

what I command. I won't expect you to find the strength in yourself to hold on to my commands. No, I will send you the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, who, like a close friend, will put his arm around your shoulder and help you see why this way or that way will honor God and bless your loved ones. The Holy Spirit will be a great Counselor for you. But *the world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*

This is another of Jesus' lessons on love to remember. The Holy Spirit will be in you; he lives with you. He'll help your conscience to prick you when you've done something wrong. Guilt is your friend **IF** it quickly escorts you to the empty cross. That's where Jesus finished his work of paying for all your sins. Take that guilt off your shoulders and hang it on the cross. Leave it there. The Holy Spirit will be in you; he lives with you. He will prompt you to say to yourself and others, "Hey, let's go to church. We need to hear God's Word because that's how we stay connected to Jesus." The Holy Spirit will be in you; he lives with you. He might even prompt you to open your Bible and read as much as a chapter or two per day just for you. Or if you're better at listening than reading, he might prompt you to

access the Bible by audio. Or if you can't make enough sense from what was written down in the Bible long ago, the Holy Spirit might prompt you to ask your pastor questions about what a portion of the Bible means, or to check out one of the excellent commentaries in your church library, or to attend a Bible class so you can regularly pick up on what the Holy Spirit hid for you in the Holy Book. The Holy Spirit might even help you get to the point where you agree with what your pastor said during Catechism classes: "These classes are only the beginning of your life-long and in-depth study of the Bible."

If you listen to the Holy Spirit's quiet whispers, then Jesus' next promise will come true in your life. ¹⁸*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.* ¹⁹*Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me.* Most people think Jesus was just talking about showing himself alive to the disciples after his resurrection. But think about it, thinkers. Can you see how much further Jesus' promise reaches? Think how Jesus still comes to you and me today. How? Primarily in his Word. He promised that wherever even just two or three people come together in his name, there he is with them. How many twos or threes are gathered in this house of the Lord today? Jesus is here with us right now.

It is entirely appropriate to say, "Hello, Jesus." Some people think of Jesus as being way out there in heaven. It's not like he's got a baby-monitor here in this church with the speaker next to his throne so he can know what's happening at St. John's. He's here with us. It would be appropriate for us to say, "Thank you for saving us, Jesus." We wouldn't even have to shout for him to hear us. *Some of you might be thinking, "Yeah, but Jesus doesn't answer us back." And you'd be right, thinkers. We do not get to hear an audible reply from Jesus. But what if you flip things around and think of it this way. Jesus started the conversation with his people. First he did his saving work some 2000 years ago. Then he starts the conversation again by speaking to us in the Word, proving that he did not leave us as orphans. His voice is in the Bible. Once Jesus has done his talking, we are the ones who answer back. How? By our prayers. But then also all week long by catching ourselves whenever we cross the line, and taking all our wrongs to Jesus. We already know he forgives us. So we've learned we can be completely honest about whatever we do wrong. "I did this, dear Savior, and it was sinful. I'm sorry." An orphan wouldn't see Jesus in the words of the gospel spoken through a fellow believer: "I forgive you all your sins."

Think where else we see Jesus. Hint: look at the table. Ah, Holy Communion. Jesus joins his body to the bread and his blood to the wine—don't ask me how, I don't fully understand. But he said, "This is my body. This is my blood." And he's God. So if he wants to give us the same body and blood by which he won forgiveness for us on the cross, along with the bread and wine, he can. Jesus did not leave us as orphans. Holy Communion is one of the ways that we get to see Jesus, and the world completely misses seeing him.

But Jesus isn't done loving us. Here's another lesson on love to remember: ¹⁹*Because I live, you also will live.* Not only will we rise from the dead if we die before Jesus comes back, we are alive now, alive in Christ through the Holy Spirit's work, no longer spiritually dead in our transgressions and sins. That's how much Jesus loves us.

When you stay connected to Jesus through God's Word, perhaps reading a little each day, you get to the point where the Holy Spirit brings everything into focus and you finally see the big picture. Jesus says, ²⁰*On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.* That's how much Jesus

loves you. He has taken up residence in your heart and mind. Love him back, dear friends, love him back for your whole life.

How? Let Jesus explain. ²¹*Whoever has my commands and obeys them, [this] is the one who loves me.* See how love goes beyond mere words and shows itself in our actions? While it's true that we can love God only because he loved us first, Jesus now says it works the other way around too. *Those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.* Those of you who have been working on living for Jesus many years, I doubt any of you would report seeing Jesus with the eyes in your head. But Jesus has shown himself to you in the ways he had directed your life, blessing you by putting certain people in your life who help you stay on the path of life. Someday soon enough he will also show himself to you by taking you to his heavenly home.

Love Jesus. Obey his commands as laid out in the New Testament. Watch for the Holy Spirit to serve as your Counselor through God's Word and Sacrament. Notice that the Holy Spirit and Jesus live in you to love you and help you love him and others. Remember these lessons on love.