

LET US NOT LOSE OUR IDENTITY

Jesus was saying goodbye to his disciples. In a short while, they would not have Him anymore. Jesus speaks to them with special affection: "*My little children, I shall not be with you much longer.*" They make a small and fragile community, with just a few days together. The disciples feel like small children. What will they do without Him?

Jesus has a gift for them: "*I give you a new commandment: love one another, just as I have loved you.*" If they learn to love one another the way Jesus has loved them, they will continue to feel their presence among them. The same love they have received from Jesus will continue to exist among them.

That is why Jesus says, "*People will recognize that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" What will make their community to be identified as Christian will be that type of love; not the public confession of their faith, or the observance of special rituals, or the fulfilment of certain commandments, but the practice of the love that Jesus has taught us. This love constitutes our very identity.

We live in a society in which a "culture of exchange" is most prevalent. People exchange things, services and help. Frequently, we even exchange sentiments, our bodies and our friendship. Eric Fromm went as far as to say that "*love is a marginal phenomenon in our modern society.*" People who are capable of loving are an exception.

This analysis could sound too pessimistic, but one thing remains certain: the practice of Christian love requires that we stay away from much of what constitutes modern society. One cannot practice the love that Jesus speaks about without resisting the style of relations and selfish interests that predominate in our society today.

If the Church's influence seems to be disappearing in our society, it is not only because of any crisis within our religious institutions. In the case of Christianity, it is also because its members cannot be identified as disciples who love like Jesus told us to love. We lack our distinctive Christian *identity*.

Christians keep talking a lot about *love*, but we have not always dared to give its true content to that love: the spirit and concrete manifestations that Jesus taught us. We have failed to learn that Jesus showed his love with his actions in creative ways: a life of service and continuous fight against anything that was unjust or dehumanized people.

Jose Antonio Pagola