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In St Paul’s First Pastoral Letter to Timothy there is a list of qualifications for episcopal leadership. On the positive side the leader has to be above reproach, temperate, hospitable, an apt teacher, respectable, well thought of by outsiders. On the negative side, he should not be a drunkard, violent, quarrelsome, lover of money, puffed up with conceit.

In contemporary leadership a distinction is made between skills and values. Skills refer to demonstrable abilities that are needed to lead people in a given area. Values are self-commitments to which leaders hold themselves accountable, often aligned with the values of the organization.

In Franciscan leadership the friar or sister strives to be fair, reasonable and respectful; building up others; encourages open and respectful dialogue; facilitate the development and progress of others; to know what one does not know; embody qualities of compassion, humility, and empathy; supportive to the world and community.

Next to these specific and measurable requirements, St John’s criterion in today’s Gospel is *“Do you love Me?”* It seems, well, soft. In this leadership text, Jesus does not focus on Peter’s skills and values. Instead, Jesus centers in on Peter’s spiritual identity, and brings him into this deeper identity. If Peter can achieve this, he will order his values correctly and integrate them into his apostolic activity.

And so, there is a powerful lesson to be learned. We use one word “love” for many different circumstances. In the Scriptures, there are different words for different kinds of love: *agape,* a self-giving love, a creative love, a love similar to the love of God; *philia,* ordinary human love, the kind of love we give to one another. Human love is a good thing. But it doesn’t compare to the exalted status of agape.

Three times Jesus asks Peter, *“Do you love Me?”* And three times Peter responds, *“Lord, You know I love You.”* But what we cannot hear in translation is that two different words are used here for love. What Jesus is asking of Peter is the highest form of love. What Peter is offering in return is ordinary human love.

To catch this nuance it would go something like this: “Simon, son of John, do you love Me with the highest form of love?” And Peter responds, “Lord, I love You with ordinary love.” Disappointed, Jesus tries a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me with the highest form of love.” Peter responds again, “Lord, I love You with ordinary love.” By this time, it has become clear to Jesus that although He is asking the highest form of love from Peter, what Peter is offering in return is ordinary love. This sets the lesson that is present in this Gospel. Jesus asks a third time, and this time Jesus does not use the word *agape.* This time He uses Peter’s word for love. A third time Jesus says, *“Simon, son of John, so you love Me with ordinary love?”*  And Peter says, *“Lord, You know everything, You know that’s the way I love you.”* Then Jesus says, *“Feed My sheep.”*

Even as Peter falls short of Jesus’ expectation, Jesus accepts Peter anyway, and makes him shepherd of the sheep. Jesus wanted the highest form of love from Peter, but Peter could only offer a lesser kind of love. Jesus settles for second best. Jesus still commissions Peter to be the leader of the Early Church. Yes, Jesus shows us the way that God loves us. God always calls us to more, always calls us to a higher level. But when we fall short, God accepts us, accepts what we offer.

This Gospel message for today is both comforting and challenging; comforting, because we consider our own inadequacies; challenging, because the greatest commandment is that we are to love one another as Jesus loves us, even when we don’t rise to the highest level. Then, in a way Peter says to Jesus, *“I’m not giving You the love You want* *but I’m giving You what I have.”* Jesus accepts that love, and commissions Peter to feed His sheep.

Peter is reconciled, walks with Jesus and three times professes his love. Peter is given three penances to restore what he severed with his betrayals: he is to tell the story of his sin and forgiveness; he is to forgive everyone everything as he has been forgiven; and he is to go out and search for the lost ones, as Jesus the Good Shepherd has found him—*“todos, todos, todos—everyone, everyone, everyone.”* This is the work of the Church—the great catch of fish—the last story in John’s Gospel of the entire world that can be caught in the net of the Gospel, if the disciples act on Jesus’ word.

Pope Francis gave great importance to our being witnesses to the Risen Lord. We participate by giving witness to the Resurrection. In this Jubilee Year of Hope, we remember that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of Christian hope. With this hope we are able to confront difficult situations with courage, perseverance and determination. Our witness gives praise to the Lord, for He has rescued us, has turned our mourning into dancing.

The Church, today, enters the period of Inter-regnum, brought about by the timely death of Pope Francis. We continue to pray for the repose of Pope Francis as he joins the first pope in praising the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

The Chair of Peter is vacant, and the work of selecting a successor begins. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, may the Cardinal-Electors be inspired to be bold witnesses of the Gospel to the poor and oppressed. May we remember *“Do you love Me?”* guides us on our journey of faith and service.