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IN NOMINE JESU

I Corinthians 12: 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

A MORE EXCELLENT WAY!

St. Paul begins his Song of Love in I Corinthians 13 by giving it the appropriate title: The More Excellent Way. Towering high above all the gifts and achievements of man, topping all the success stories ever written -- there is love. A sermon on love is a hard one to preach, because people have so many different and false notions about what love really is. Of all the worn, smudged, dog-eared words in our vocabulary, 'love' is sure the grubbiest, smelliest, slimiest, complained Aldous Huxley in Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow. Bawled from a million pulpits, lasciviously crooned through hundreds of millions of loud-speakers, it has become an outrage to good taste and decent feeling, and obscenity which one hesitates to pronounce. And yet it has to be pronounced, for after all, love is the last word. The love which is the last word is not the love of which Tin Pan Alley sings. The love which St. Paul calls a still more excellent way is the love which comes from God. It is the way above all ways because it is the supreme expression of the man who lives from God, and in Christ and for His Church. Listen to the apostle describe it: If I speak in the tongue of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it doesn not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Modern man groans for this divine love. Do we really believe that unredeemed, unregenerate man - apart from God - secure in his own build-up of strength - can build THE GREAT SOCIETY, a real utopia? What kind of life has

this new age of technology and progress - of nuclear fission, rocket power, and space travel - brought to our world? Are people today more secure now than they were before, better able to live with one another in peace? Is life fuller and joy more complete in this push-button age than it was in the light-a-candle age? Has automation with its promise of more leisure time brought fulfillment or increased frustrations to the millions of people across the world? I don't have to spell out the answers to these questions. Despite the fact that the world has entered a new age, it still looks pretty much like the old life: full of strife and envy, characterized by selfishness and backbiting, governed by the same old drives toward prestige and power.

This is the way of sin and lovelessness. Who can explain it? There is no rational explanation for that which by its very nature is irrational. Evil is chaos; it is the unthinkable. The widow of Mr. Christiansen talking to the reporters and saying, Why? - The mother of one of those three boys who were hppped up on goof balls saying, He couldn't have done it; he couldn't have done it! - The staggering fact that we can look at an Adolph Eichmann in our Century and watch a man sitting impassively in his prison cell being charged with the murder of 6,000,000 people -- this is unthinkable. The bombing of Dresden at the end of World War II by American planes, a city with no military installations, no military value, crowded with refugees -- this is unthinkable. What is going on in the Congo - what is going on in our own country where people and presidents are shot down in cold blood, where cruelty and hatred are stalking our streets - what is going on in our own lives and our own congregation where so much that we do is governed by selfishness rather than selflessness! -- None of this is rational! But that does not mean it does not exist. It exists all too horribly. It is the condition of our existence.

The Bible is realistic in its view of man. It does not gloss over the problems of people. When the Son of God came, as the God of all history promised He would come, He demonstrated a noticably realistic insight into the nature of

man. As one of His disciples put it, He knew what is in man. Knowing what is in man, He went His way. Obviously, His way is not our way. When we go our way, we forget about everyone else and think only of ourselves. The Son of God went His own way - it was a way of sorrows, leading to a Cross. Always thinking of others and never of Himself, He laid down His life for the sins of the world. What made Christ do it? The Bible describes His unselfish attitude and actions with one word: love.

The love of Christ is not a sweet, sickly, sentimental thing. The love of a man with enough iron in His blood to go innocently to a Cross, giving His life in atonement for the sins of others, has all the virile quality that could ever be expected of a man. It is the kind of love women and children look for in a man, with a hard core of loyalty surrounded by a world of warmth in which is to be found kindness, sympathy, understanding, congeniality, and forgiveness for what has gone wrong, together with a solid honesty that invites trust and confidence. This is the love which is willing to give itself away, willing to be consumed, willing to be crucified - nailed to the cross. This is what St. Paul calls The More Excellent Way.

Let there be no mistake about it. The way of love is not an easy way. It is a hard way. It means that men will hate you and despise you - they will take advantage of you and play you for a sucker - they will despitefully use you and abuse you and persecute you. In the midst of it all love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

This is the way Christ gave His life away. Christ does not merely show the more excellent way. He is the Way, and He is the Life. It is not enough just to know His way. The way of Christ must be followed. A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also

love one another. To follow Christ is to ushered into a new life - a life so different from the life of the world all about us that it is like being introduce to a new world. It almost scares people to talk about it. They don't even like to think about it. They don't like to think about it because it means giving one's life away. It meant that in the life of Christ, and it means that in the life of every man who follows Christ: If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me, for whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's will find it.

Love is not afraid. It is not afraid of giving itself away. This is the hardest thing a man has to do - to see himself not just as others see him but as he really is, and to give himself away. For most people this is to die, to destroy their dream. Afraid to live and afraid to die, afraid to accept the love of God and afraid to reject it openly, they ask, How do we know it will work? Like Francis Thompson, they say to themselves: I am sore adread lest, having Him, I must have naught beside. When you have Him, really have Him, you will want nothing else beside. Christ alone makes life worth living. He is Life itself who promises: Whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's will find it. St. Paul very graphically and practically describes this More Excellent Way in his letter to the Philippians: So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, and affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross.

Herein is love, says John, not that we love Him but that He loved us and gave His Son to be a propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. This is the More Excellent Way because it is the Way of God! Amen.