

Being the good son that I am, I call my mom every other Sunday. Invariably, we talk about her health- and we used to talk about my father driving her crazy- and we talk about what's going on with her cats and what's the latest on my brother and my sisters, and being the good mother that she is, invariably the conversation comes around to how I'm doing physically. And I dance around the question and answer as vaguely as I can. And invariably she'll get upset and yell at me for not taking care of myself and not taking a day off and all that. One time after she really reamed me out about not taking care of myself well enough, as I was saying goodbye and saying "I love you" to her, she said: *"If you love me, you'd do what I say and take care of yourself. Don't say you love me if you don't do what will make me happy."*

And then she says: *"I love you too."*

Talk about guilt- Italian guilt and Catholic guilt together which is like nothing else, believe me. But she's right- how can I say I love my mom if I don't do what she tells me to do which is about my best interests anyway? What is love if it doesn't cost you something? What's the point of love if it doesn't commit you in some way? I'm not saying that love has to go against what is easy or that it doesn't entail so many wonderful things, but if it's love it's going to demand something of you for the sake of the beloved and you don't count the cost then because it is for the beloved.

As all good mothers do, she gave her life for her children from the very moments each of them were born and her own life is so permanently entwined with the lives of her children, even though we're all grown up and mature and responsible persons and we don't need her to do most of what she had done for us when we were kids. But we still need her to love us and she needs us to love her right back- not in a selfish way on either side but rather because this love is an

integral part of who each one of us is and it makes each one of us happier and more fulfilled than we can ever imagine.

This is not just a Mother's Day homily- it's also an analogy of what we heard in today's Gospel. *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* A legalist- someone who goes by the letter of the law and even makes the law an idol in itself- understands this statement in reverse- *"You will keep my commandments if you love me."*

Meaning we have to prove that we love God by doing what he tells us to do. Meaning being afraid of God because he will punish us for all eternity if we're not the good little boys and girls that never make mistakes and never fail to be less than perfect. Meaning God is not going to love us unless we impress him with how good we are. As if, like with any good parent, he could keep himself from loving us anyway.

God, being God, loves us all unconditionally and it is only because we are loved first that we are able to love at all. Jesus simply wanted to remind his disciples that the love he had showed in his life- and would soon show in his death and resurrection and the sending of the Advocate to be his presence with us at all times and in all places- that love was to be the continuation of his own life into the lives of his followers and that love is what saved the world in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

That divine love that God the Father expressed in bringing forth his Son is a divine communion that we are called to enter into- to enter the bond of love between God the Father and God the Son that God the Holy Spirit keeps in being and shares with the world- and that divine love is an integral part of who God is and that divine love is an integral part of who each one of us is as his beloved creation. Living that divine love in our relationships and our actions

and our choices and our attitudes makes us happier and more fulfilled than we can ever imagine, and not to anthropomorphize God too much but I'm sure it does the same thing for him.

And again not to anthropomorphize too much, but we know how happy God is today as his children- his "little angels" receive their First Communion today. Because this is their first chance to fully share in the Eucharistic celebration that we are blessed to take part in ourselves, and we share in their love of the Lord and we thank God for all the love He has shown them. And now as they will receive the Body and Blood of Christ in a little while, they will hopefully begin a lifetime of being faithful to this sacrament, not out of a sense of obligation, but out of a desire to accept the love and the new life that God is always offering to us in Jesus Christ.

So we ask God to bless in a special way today these children, as well as their parents and families and teachers and all who have contributed to the upbringing and their formation as Christians. May these children always see themselves as worthy sons and daughters of so great a God, a God who comes to us in the humble form of bread and wine and who simply asks us to love one another as He has loved us.