

Jesus' teaching today seems very *hard* to achieve –

And perhaps it *is* – if we're not *ready* to choose *love*.

*This* weekend, even the *pagans* of our age are celebrating *Valentine's Day*.

Celebrating *love*.

And *my!* How we *throw* that word *about* in our language and culture!

It has so many *different* meanings –

Just this *one* English word.

*I love my wife.*

*I love my mother.*

*I love my dog.*

*I love pizza!*

We can *use* the word *love* to express our *taking pleasure* –

And *taking* it in *things* that serve *us* – often *selfishly*.

And we can use *love* to describe our deep *affection* for *another*,

As we do so *commonly* on a day like *Valentine's Day*.

But even *there* –

In loving another *person* –

It's *not* about the *pleasure* we *take* –

But the *heart* we *give*.

An *intimate* relationship *cannot* thrive –

When we *withhold* a part of our *hearts* from the one we profess *love*.

And if we spend our time *treating* a relationship like

Someone who bought a really fancy *car* –

But *now* he has *buyers' remorse* –

Well, where's the love in treating another like a *commodity* that's bought and *sold*.

In *true* love, loss is *gain* –

We *lose* ourselves –

That *withholding* – *selfish* self.

We give our *whole* heart to the one we love –

And in a *real* marriage – the one we love does the very *same*.

My friends,

The *Gospel* today is coming from the Word of God made *incarnate* –

Made *perfect* – *complete* –

The *law* – is *Fulfilled* in the *true* marriage between humanity and divinity –

In the *person* of Jesus *Himself*.

He doesn't just *tell* us the law of love –

He *lives* it.

He *gives* Himself for *love* of you and me –

Even though time-and-again – His love goes *unrequited*.

*Rejected*.

The *first* reading *encourages* us that love is *ours* for the *choosing*!

But *Jesus* tells us it's *not* just a matter of checking off a list of do's and *don'ts*.

We don't *love* someone and spend all day thinking:

*What can I get **away** with and still claim I **love** her?*

*What is the **least** I can do, and she will **stay** with me?*

Jesus challenges us to go *deeper* in love –

Ready to give our whole *heart* to it – *all in!*

As *He* is all-in for *us*!

*Dying* to our own self-seeking *frees* us to *truly* come *alive!*

Who has *not* truly loved to the point of choosing to *sacrifice* for love's sake?

And *not* regret it – but to be at *peace* –

To feel *complete* in oneself for *choosing* that difficult act,

That *true* love makes *easy*.

And *who* has not known the *anguish* and *unrest* and bitter *regret*

Of *forsaking* love of another for some petty self-serving *impulse* –

*Diminishing* our lives.

Jesus' Gospel says we *ought* to follow *every* letter of the Law –

And *then* some!

If there's no *love* in it, then the law is not only *hard* – but *impossible*.

But in *surrendering* our hearts to love –

*Everything* is made possible, by Him who *literally* loved us to *death*.

He *encourages* us that ***little things mean a lot***.

*Tend* the little *dispositions*,

That either *open* our hearts to what is *good* and *life-giving* –

Or *crush* the heart under the weight of *evil* – *sucking* the life *out* of us.

Jesus *said*: We shall not *kill*.

But tend to the garden in which the weeds of *hatred*, *anger*, and *envy*

That *choke* the heart until it becomes *murderous*.

May we *dispose* our hearts to the *good*.

If a person has committed *adultery* with another –

The weeds of *lust* and *withholding* of the *self* –

*Already* ruptured that relationship *long* before lying *down* with another.

As for the *good* little things –

Practice small acts of *kindness* –

Doing a *little* something for the benefit of *another* in need –

*Especially* if there's nothing in it for *us*.

*Refrain* from casting judgment and cultivate a heart for *reconciliation*.

And these *small* seeds of selflessness yield an *amazing* garden of the *good* life.

*Look* to the *little* things –

*Tiny* choices for good or evil – for life or death.

The *roots* of our self-destruction, or our enduring happiness.

You've *heard* of a *snowball* effect?

In the case of tiny little *good* things –

They can start with just a *snowflake* –

Then a *handful* –

Rolled into great *mounds* – forming a remarkable *snowman*.

On the *other* hand,

One *flake* of the desire to *reject* love –

To *treat* others *selfishly* or *carelessly* – *coldly* or *cruelly* –

When we think no one is *watching*, and we can *get away* with it –

Well, that *tiny* speck of a flake that chooses *evil* over *good* in our heart –

Becomes a great *avalanche* of destruction by our own *choosing*.

May we choose *love* –

In even the *littlest* ways –

Cultivating the *good* life –

A life of *giving* over *taking* –

As *Christ* gives *His* all, for *us* to live life to the *fullest*.