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It's truly an astounding Gospel where Jesus declares that he is more than the son of Joseph and Mary. He is actually the Son of God and he is ready to share that life with those who believe in him.

These lessons today — the Gospel, the lesson from the Book of Kings, and the lesson from the Letter to the Church at Ephesus — all are calling us to know Jesus more deeply and then to follow him, to be converted. Going back to the beginning of this church year when Jesus first proclaimed, "The reign of God is at hand; change your lives," ever since we've been reflecting on what it means to change our lives. Today we must do that once more, check up on how we're doing at changing our lives to follow him.

The Gospel itself is very challenging. Jesus is the bread of life and the one who teaches us in his humanness how to come into everlasting life, who teaches us the way of God. But it's even more challenging if you listen to the passage from the Letter to the Ephesians because the writer, Paul, urges us to be converted, but not in a sense to follow the human Jesus, challenging enough, but he says actually, "Be imitators of God, as God's most beloved children, strive to imitate God." How do we do that?

There are many things that we can reflect on, but in that letter to the Church at Ephesus, Paul describes some of the individual things. Probably the most important thing is to go right to the ultimate revelation of God as love. This brings us to Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Some of us, I'm sure, still have an idea that somehow Jesus had to die on the cross to make reparation for us because of our sins, that God struck a bargain, in a sense, with Jesus to give up his life and go through all that torture, suffering, and death, and pay the price for the sins of humankind and those sins will be wiped away.

That's a strange kind of God and it's really not the God revealed to us in Jesus or throughout our sacred Scriptures. The God who's revealed to us is the God on the cross, not buying us back, but showing us the ultimate way of love: "Greater love than this no one has than to lay down your life for a friend." That's what Jesus is doing on the cross, showing us love that is greater than any other love. Jesus dies on the cross manifesting God's way of love, which is the way of forgiveness, the way of reconciliation.

God doesn't demand anything from us. God reaches out in love to envelope us, enclose us in that love and bring about forgiveness and healing for us. When Paul says, "Be imitators of God," Paul is urging us to love as God loves, to love without demanding anything in return, to love as an absolute gift, to love without any strings attached. God is love and God shows us that love on the cross in Jesus who is Son of God. Now St. Paul makes it more practical, in a sense; love in a generic way can be kind of generalized.

But Paul brings it down to everyday things: "Do away with all quarreling, rage, anger, insults, every kind of malice. Instead be good and understanding, mutually forgiving one another as God forgave each of us in Christ." That's the kind of love that God is expecting of us — everyday actions that show us giving up the idea of anger, getting even, quarreling, and instead being understanding with one another, sharing with one another, and that means in our everyday life.

Sometimes people choose this particular passage from Paul's Letter to the Church at Ephesus for weddings because it gets right down to the nitty-gritty of everyday life in a family. That's where it has to begin if we're going to be converted to the way of love within our own family circle, within our parish family, our parish community, within our neighborhood, that family of our brothers and sisters, fellow citizens, in our country and keep on going beyond that trying to create reconciliation, forgiveness, and love within the human family. This is an extraordinary kind of conversion that God is asking of us.

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Each Sunday as we listen to these Scriptures, I hope we are trying to apply them to our immediate everyday life so that gradually we are being converted. As I speak about this, I also think of what Jesus did for his disciples before he was tortured and executed on the cross. At the Last Supper, Jesus showed us an extraordinary act of love in the service he provided for his community. He took the role of a slave to wash their feet. You remember how Peter got all upset, "No, no, you can't wash my feet. I'm not going to let you do that." Jesus said, "If I don't, you'll have nothing to do with me." Jesus was intent on showing us the way of service as the way of love.

As we face the reality that our parish family is to be closed soon, we realize what a gift it has been to be part of this parish family where people really do love one

another, give service to one another, share with one another, care about one another. The spirit of community love is very real. I've heard sometimes people say to members of the parish, "Just get over it. Go someplace else." That's so lacking in understanding of what happens when a parish community begins to live according to this challenge of St. Paul when we really do care about one another and there is a legacy of love and sharing and goodness.

Today I hope we listen carefully to these scriptures and once more take up the work of changing our lives, following more carefully and sincerely the way of God, be imitators of God, a God who is love. If we can in small ways and larger ways in our lives, in our immediate family community and going beyond that, reaching out to the world community; if we can work on ways to be imitators of God in every part of our life, then as Jesus promised when he called us to that conversion, the reign of God will break forth. That reign will bring peace, love, joy, and fullness of life into our hearts and gradually into our world.

[Homily given Aug. 12 at St. Philomena, Detroit, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]