

*Prefer nothing to the love of Christ*

-perhaps the theme of all our readings today. Love is a much-abused word, now, but there's no getting away from it in our journey to God. For we journey towards love, we move and have our being in love, we are love in so far as we participate in God who is love. Aelred of Rievaulx distinguishes between good and bad love – so perhaps its abuse is not so recent as we might like to think. He distinguishes, indeed, between charity and love in general, which can be bad.

*The good use of good things makes us good, because it produces a good love in us. But the abuse of good things gives rise to bad love, and makes us bad in consequence. Therefore we may define charity as the good use of love, and cupidity .. as the abuse of love.*

(Speculum Caritatis p.94)

In short, we can love the wrong things; we can love in the wrong way.

The love of Christ, then, both his love for us and our love for him, is of a different order to love in general. Indeed, it's our guide, our way, through the maze of possibilities which love entails. *Love and do what you will*, as St. Augustine said, is all very well, but we need some sort of rule, some sort of inspiration to guide us, as Augustine, of course, well knew. So we have the Rule of St. Benedict, based on the Rule of Christ, based on the Rule of God; rule or straight way, rather than a series of legal constraints; rule rather than law, and a rule, therefore, based on charity; a rule full of concern for individual difference; a rule as between persons rather than automatons or legal entities; a rule designed for friendship, for the kith and kin of God. Sr. Goedele has lived this rule for fifty years now, and has become a friend of God, relaxed in God's presence, open-hearted, full of joy. I hope that's a fair description not only of Sr. Goedele, but of all of us here seeking God, of all of us here seeking God's friendship, not in collusion with our defects, but as the inspiration for all that is good in us, for all that is God in us.

*You are my friends if you do what I command you.*

and *'my command to you is to love one another*, to enjoy that friendship with one another which you now enjoy with God. Indeed, you cannot have one without the other; you cannot enjoy the one without the other. And this is the fruit that matters above all else, the sign that we are indeed in friendship with God: we will have joy – we will be known by our joy – we will be enjoyed. Or, in the words of St. Benedict to those still at the beginning of their journey into God

*The monk should not immediately be dismayed and run away in fear from the way of salvation, whose entrance must be narrow. But, as we advance in monastic life and faith, our heart will be enlarged and we will run in the way of the commandments with the unspeakable sweetness of love.*

Wie niet leefheeft,  
kent God niet,  
want God is liefde.