



St. John the Apostle is known to us all as the "Apostle of Love."

*"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing-life forever more" (Psalm 133:1-3).*

Christian brotherhood brings together the knowledgeable with the less knowledgeable, the young with the old and the rich with poor in one accord. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III has written that "Love is the first of virtues; nay, it is the conglomeration of all virtues."

St. Peter the Apostle preached, *"Since you have purified your souls in obedience to the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. And above all things have fervent love for*

*one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins"* (I Peter 1:22; 3:8,9; 4:8).

Do your actions place more emphasis on knowledge than love? His Holiness Pope Shenouda III teaches "knowledge may breed conceit; but it is love that builds. Religion is not mere practice or formality or even a duty to be imposed, but it is love, and as much love as one has to God, to people, and to benevolence, so will be his reward in the Day of Judgment." Love diminishes the knowledge gaps between brothers. Knowledge is a rightful pursuit if one chooses this pursuit but is not a vainglorious attainment over another brother.

St. Paul specifically tells us that brotherly love excels knowledge, "*Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies*" (I Corinthians 8:1).

Often many believe the deacons to lead the congregation in responses during the Divine Liturgy should be those of middle to late adulthood age, many believe the most knowledgeable in the church to be the middle to late adulthood age, and the servants to teach in Sunday School have similar qualifications by age as well. The youth are often looked at as simply youth not as growing brothers and sisters within the church. Yet, most agree that we all bring gifts into the church to share with each

other but perhaps the youth have overlooked talents which should be examined more.

The Lord Jesus Christ taught many lessons related to brotherly love while upon the earth. Many teachings did not specify a certain age for brotherly love but rather the action of love itself was the focus. "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (Matthew 19:19). "*This is My commandment that you love one another as I have loved you*" (John 15:12). "*And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise*" (Luke 6:31).

Tertullian (c.197) said, "It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. They say, 'See how they love one another!' And they are angry with us, too, because we call each other brother." Deeds not age was the emphasis.

Does a particular person or persons continually lead the deacons in responses during the Divine Liturgy or is it shared without reference to age? Are everyone's abilities to serve encouraged through brotherly love with both the very young to the elder allowed to share in the responses? Many believe the young are too young to assume this responsibility.

The Holy Bible says, "*And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no*

*means lose his reward"* (Matthew 10:42). A cup of cold water or encouraging the young to lead in a response, both if given with brotherly love can become a great things in the eyes of the receiver and has a reward from God. Instill in the young deacons a place of belonging and a need for their services and perhaps they will grow continuing to serve as deacons to old age.

Are the younger and elder servants allowed to participate in presenting the lesson during Sunday School? The future leadership of the Church will one day depend upon these very youth. Brotherly love from those most knowledgeable will be well received from the youth if nurtured in service. One cannot serve if never given the active opportunity of service. *"Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith"* (I Timothy 1:5).

Is your church committees' representative of everyone? Do they include the young and the elder within your congregations? *"Through love serve one another"* (Galatians 5:13). Should those who can speak the strongest fill our committees or should the committees comprise a sampling of the congregation? It is written by the Apostle Paul to the Romans, *"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak and not to please*

*ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification" (Romans 15:1,2).*

Brotherly love is much more than witnessed service. It is also exhibited in the simplest of service to those who are in need. Do the widows and those less fortunate feel the sincere love of the brethren? When was the last time you asked a widow of the congregation did she have transportation to the church to attend Vespers or the Divine Liturgy? *"But whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (I John 3:11,14-18).*

Tertullian (c.197) wrote, "We are the same to emperors as to our ordinary neighbors. For we are equally forbidden to wish ill, to do ill, to speak ill, to think ill of any person. The things which we must not do to an emperor, we must not do to anyone else."

The elderly have many gifts to share though they may have lost some physical capacities. St. John the Apostle is known to us all as the "Apostle of Love". When he became old and could no longer actively preach as in his younger years, the believers would place St John between the faithful in the Church where he would teach them, "My children love one

another." This was a simple message from an elderly person yet with a very powerful meaning. This simple message was sufficient for everyone's salvation that adhered to these quietly spoken words. Through his great love for the Lord, St. John continued to share this message throughout his old age.

Athenagoras (c.175) summarizes the simplicity of brotherly love in his message, "Among us you will find uneducated persons, artisans, and old women. They may be unable in words to prove the benefit of our doctrine. However, by their deeds, they demonstrate the benefit arising from their accepting its truth. They do not rehearse speeches, but exhibit good works. When struck, they do not strike again. When robbed, they do not go to the law. They give to those who ask of them, and love their neighbors as themselves."

Further, Tatian (c.160) said, "With us there is no vainglory, nor do we indulge in a variety of opinions. For having renounced the popular and earthly, obeying the commands of God, and following the law of the Father of immortality, we reject everything which rests upon human opinion. Not only do the rich among us pursue our philosophy, but the poor enjoy free instruction. For the things which come from God surpass the rewards of worldly gifts. Thus

we accept all who desire to hear-even old women and youths. In short, persons of every age are treated by us with respect."

Truly, love reigns as the first fruit of the spirit. "*But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*" (Galatians 5:22,23).

May we all have the heart of brothers one to another.

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