

"Love one another as I have loved you"

Homily of May 25, 2003

by Fr. Gerry Murphy

Almost every day in our newspapers or on TV or on the Internet we hear about new scientific discoveries and advancement. Sometimes it's exciting new discoveries about the evolution of our universe; other times it's about the latest and fastest computer software and often it is about exciting medical research that promises a possible cure for cancer or Aids. One area of scientific research that has received a lot of coverage in recent years is that of genetic engineering and stem cell research. Scientific advances have already made test-tube babies routine, sex selection of children possible before conception and will soon make it possible for parents to pre-select other characteristics as well.

A few weeks ago a young student at DVC called me and asked me if she could interview me for a paper she was writing on human cloning. I paused and asked myself 'what on earth do I know about human cloning?' Answer: absolutely nothing. However, I agreed to meet with her, and in the meantime I did a little research on the subject - both from a scientific and ethical viewpoint. From my brief research I learned that there are two basic types of human cloning: human reproductive cloning and therapeutic cloning. The former refers to the process whereby one attempts to create a human being who would be an exact genetic replica of another human being. And the latter refers to the process whereby one produces embryos exclusively for the harvesting of their stem cells, which in turn may be used in the treatment of many serious illnesses and genetic defects.

When asked by my student friend what my views were on these medical advances, I simply stated that firstly, the production of human embryos exclusively for experimentation and then discarding those embryos was wrong. And secondly, every human being has the right to be born as the fruit of a loving relationship - not manufactured and designed to custom specifications in a laboratory, no matter how noble the end result of such a process might be.

When we produce the technology to create 'designer babies' this suggests to me that there is an even greater intolerance in our society today of imperfection. There are trends that seem to move in the direction of placing all kinds of conditions on the love we have for one another. Have we reached the point where a young parent-to-be might think along the lines: If my child is healthy, perfect, intelligent, comes at a convenient time, is the desired sex, I will love her. Otherwise, I don't want her? I sincerely hope not. And yet, so often our love for one another is terribly fragmented:

- You love me today because I am well and we can play. But will you love me

Tomorrow when I am sick, old and demanding?

- You love me today because I need you. But will you love me tomorrow when I need you less?
- You love me today because I please you. But do you truly love me for myself?

In our gospel reading Jesus tells his disciples that "No one can has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." How do we lay down our lives for love of our friends?

- When we give up time for rest and recreation to be with someone who needs a shoulder to cry on or an ear to listen to, we die for love
- When we temper our anger and hold our sharp tongues, seeking to build another's confidence, we die for love
- When we get up in the middle of the night to find the cough medicine for our sick child, we die for love
- When we lovingly accomplish our ordinary tasks so that others are served well. We die for love
- When we die to self so that another might grow, be healed and flourish, we die for love

It is because God has loved us that we are able to love one another. It is because God has made us his friends, and called us into the intimacy of his life and love, especially in the Eucharist, that love has become the defining experience of our relationship with God and the one commandment that surpasses all others. In all that we do, we are to love one another as God has loved us.