

Jesus Died for His Friends St. Matthias, apostle Saturday, May 14, 2016 8:15 AM
Acts 1:15-17, 20-26; **Jn 15:9-17** (That includes you and it includes everyone who believes in him—then for the many also, because love doesn't divide.)

Now when Jesus is speaking in such context as this—this is one of the farewell discourses from the Last Supper—he is speaking to all his believers, all his disciples through the ages; and we have to be clear about that. On the other hand, there is this group of twelve who serve a very unique purpose. But we must not think that what Jesus is speaking to his disciples he is always speaking to the twelve. He is not; **he is speaking to all of his disciples then and now and through the ages.**

Now about the twelve, well, the twelve represented the fullness of the new Israel of God. There were originally twelve tribes in the covenant. What were the names of the tribes? Well, they shift from age to age; they are not always the same tribes. Groups come and go, but the number 12 remained as a symbol of fullness. **So Jesus gathers twelve apostles, a symbol of the fullness, the end-time, the time of fulfillment, the time of completion, the time of perfection, the time of God's final work.** That's the importance of the twelve. Judas did not cooperate and left, so his number had to be filled up. But once the apostles started dying out, they weren't replaced. It was the original number of 12 that was important.

The Church believes the apostles continue to guide and direct the Church. This is the beginning of the idea of the communion of saints.

But **here Jesus is speaking directly to all of us about his love for us.** He says, **“No greater love has anyone than to lay down his life for his friends.”** This word jumps out—friends. A disciple was not a friend. A disciple was a servant, even a slave. A disciple washed the master's clothes, cooked the master's meals, made the master's bed, carried the master's burdens, but not Jesus' disciples. He wasn't the normal master. He carried their burdens. He washed their feet. **He turned the tables on his disciples, and then elevated them to this level of friendship,** which is very important. St. Thomas Aquinas said a friend means **what's mine is yours, what's yours is mine.** And Jesus as the Son of God, as the Word made flesh, is saying that to his disciples. **What I have is yours, and that includes eternal life and knowledge of the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is Jesus bringing his followers into the**

inner life of the Trinity. It's a very powerful idea, but we have to make the idea something we actually experience. That's what we have to let happen. It can't just remain an idea, a beautiful idea, a good idea, a lovely idea, but just an idea. No, **it has to be more than an idea. It has to be something we live.**

Now you may ponder this part. Jesus is talking about laying down his life for friends; in other words, he died for his disciples. It's true on the cross he said, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do," including his executioners among those who should receive mercy from God. **And the Church has understood that God really wants the conversion of the wicked, and that Jesus really died for everyone, potentially. And yet, that's not what he says. He says at the Last Supper he is dying for his friends: "This is the chalice of my blood poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins," first for you, then for many, but first for you.** Actually he died for his disciples to elevate them to this level of friendship, to break through their smallness, to cleanse them from their pettiness, and their little thinking, and their narrow hearts—not necessarily from any malice. There is no evidence that the apostles had any ill will or malice toward anyone.

But human beings are a mere reflection of something that God really wants them to become. **And the only way human beings can be transformed to what God wants us to be is through love.** And this is the love of Jesus that he has laid down his life for them; that is, **he has done this so that they would know what love is,** that they would experience love, the love of his gift of life, the love of his sacrifice. That is the meaning in this text of Jesus' death. **It is an expression of love for his own disciple's first and foremost. And that includes you and it includes everyone who believes in him—then for the many also, because love doesn't divide.** Love unites, so love includes the executioners, even the torturers, includes the Romans and the Jews, the violent and the foolish, because love cannot separate. Love includes. Love embraces. But first and foremost he died for his friends so that they would be friends. This is something worth pondering.