

# LOVE IS WHAT WE'VE BEEN THROUGH

"Love is what you've been through with somebody," said the American writer James Thurber. I think that sums up in one line, the essence of so many pre-marital counseling sessions I've had with young couples. Sure it's thrilling to fall in love, and it's great that you're sitting on top of the world. That may be the love that brought you together, but the love that keeps you together is something else. This deeper kind of love you don't fall under, or use to rule over; it can only be gone through, together. There's a book I read to my kids-perhaps so have you- called 'We're going on a bear hunt,' and it captures quite nicely the journey of this deeper love within a family.

*We're going on a bear hunt. We're going to catch a big one. What a beautiful day! We're not scared. Uh-uh! A forest! A big dark forest. We can't go over it. We can't go under it. Oh no! We've got to go through it! Stumble trip! Stumble trip! Stumble trip!*

Love is what you've been through with somebody. It has sunny and beautiful days, but also leads to desperate and dark ones. You can't go over these, you can't go under them, you just have to go through them, *Stumble trip! Stumble trip! Stumble trip!* Love is what we've been through together, and as a church family we have had more than our fair share of beautiful and sunny days in this blessed St. Hagop community. But we are also going through some dark days now together. If anyone would have said one month ago that Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter Services would be closed to the public due to global pandemic, I would have said, 'God forbid...that's crazy.' If anyone would have said that over 1 million people were sick worldwide, nearly a third of those in this country and that many have died, I would have said again, 'God forbid...that's crazy.' But these are the sad days we are facing together and we're told to prepare for worse.

And yet, we have been through things like this before. Most of us have been through the 2008 financial crisis and the terrible events of September 11, 2001. Some of our senior parishioners have seen world wars and pandemics like Polio. Our ancestors in the old country routinely faced disease, dislocation and death every time their homeland was traded back and forth between hostile neighboring powers. And even if you've never seen any of these things, no one living on this planet for more than a few years is a stranger to trial and suffering in their own lives and the ones they love most.

Well thank God then for love. For love is what we've have been through together, and all of us have been through a lot. Thank God there is a love that is stronger than romance and good feelings, which falls apart when things get tough. Thank God there is a love that can even endure great suffering and forgive many sins; a love that is stronger even than death. As you well know, in our Christian faith, true love is not merely a feeling, an idea or even a moral law; Love is a person. The great poets felt love, the great prophets taught love, but Jesus embodied love, like no one before him or since. Therefore, Jesus' masterpiece on love is not a book or a song or a law, it is a week. It is a holy week which we embark on today, following our Lord through the bright triumph of Palm Sunday into the darkness of betrayal and death, so that we might come to trust, more and more, that love is what we've been through together.

In our lives and all the important relationships which give them meaning, there are always times of trial. Like Jesus, we too have loved ones who are sick and dying. We too are misunderstood and sometimes even betrayed by the ones we love. We ourselves, in our sin, cause pain and suffering to others. There is no way over, under or around the sin and suffering that is part of our condition in this world. But there is one way through it.

Jesus said "I am the way and the truth and the life," (Jn 14:6), and asks us to follow his way in the scripture readings, hymns and prayers of Holy Week, in order to learn the eternal lessons of love from its master. Join us for Holy Thursday's service of darkness, where we'll read accounts of how true love perseveres through misunderstanding and betrayal. Join us for Good Friday's burial service, where we'll recall that love endures all things, even death on the cross. Join together as a Diocese for a livestreamed Easter service from New York City's St. Vartan cathedral, where the darkness will be overcome with the joy of Easter Resurrection. Dear faithful, Jesus' way is a blessed way that offers many sunny and beautiful days. But like these troubled days we are living today, it is a way that is no stranger to trial and tribulation. If we wish to meet these trials in our lives with love and grace, let us then walk with our Lord through them. For truly love is what we've been through together, and if we are with Jesus on the way of the cross, we will emerge with him to the glorious light and eternal love of his Easter Resurrection; now and always, amen.