

**The Identity of Love**  
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Once a stranger first time came to meet me in my office. About 35 years-old stranger had a young girl with him. After we greeted each other, the young man introduced himself giving me his full name, his address and his occupation. But he did not say anything about the girl with him. Wanting the girl also to get involved in our conversation I asked the young man: Friend, is the girl with you your daughter?

“No Father. She is my wife. I have come to her father’s house at Ahmedabad,” the young man hailing from a far away place in Saurashtra told me.

“My friend, please forgive me for mistaking your wife as your daughter. I made a big mistake,” I apologized to the couple for my blunder.

“Father, I am of small stature. That is why you mistook me for his daughter. Isn’t it?” The young girl said to me making light of the embarrassing situation. My hats off to the sixth sense of that perceptive woman!

“Father, we are Christians,” said the young man proudly unmindful of my blunder.

The conversation of the young man and woman made me feel light and forgiven. “From now on I will be careful not to prejudge people and from forming wrong notion of strangers,” I said.

Usually in my office I welcome all people with love and warmth who come to meet me. I am pleased to meet strangers without any discrimination of their caste or religion, culture or language. Many people open up to me and speak intimately of their personal lives. I do not ask the people their caste or creed in welcoming them. I talk to people warmly as each one is a brother or sister of me and they deserve my love and respect.

My habit of welcoming people with warmth and love has been put into verses by a poet friend, Prakash Jalal. His poem has been published in the Silver Jubilee Souvenir of Catholic Information Service. Here are a few stanzas of the poem written originally in Gujarati.

The CISS Office door is open for all.  
There are love and agape for each one.  
You are welcome in person,  
Or through phone calls and letters.  
Your visit always turns to be a memorable event.  
The effort is always unity of all religions.

People of all caste and creed come to CISS office. But as the poet Prakash says, in CISS office my staff personnel or I do not make any discrimination of the people. The young man sitting in front of me has introduced himself as a Christian because he was proud of his faith and he came to meet me because he wanted to be a collaborator of CISS in spreading the message of Jesus Christ and the Bible.

Seeing the couple sitting in front of me, an old question came to my mind. "Would there be enough proof if you are accused of being a follower of Jesus Christ?"

In the last analysis there is only one criterion of evidence to prove a person to be genuine disciple of Jesus Christ. It is the criterion of love. Jesus giving his disciples a new command of love said: "If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples" (Jn 13, 35).

In spite of my blunder the reaction of the young couple proved to me that they love each other and respect me, an elder. The couple's mutual love and their love for others are the forces in the couple's life for their desire to spread Jesus message of love, forgiveness and service.

We know that St Paul was a true disciple of Jesus who understood well Jesus message of love. He writes, "For the whole Law is summed up in one commandment: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself'" (Gal. 5, 14). He says further, "We are ruled by the love of Christ, now that

we recognize that one man died for everyone, which means that all share in his death” (2 Cor. 5, 14).

Jesus himself so to say used the criterion of love if a person is his disciple or not. So Jesus had only on accusation against his detractors who were seeking to kill him. Jesus said, “I know what kind of people you are, and I know that you have no love for God in your hearts” (Jn 5, 42).

St. John, an apostle in his letter in the New Testament clearly explains, “Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 Jn 4, 7-8).

Many people claim to be disciples of Jesus and are proud of it. I am also one of them. But a person does not become automatically a disciple of Jesus simply by claiming himself/herself a disciple or by being proud to be a disciple. There is only one criterion to be a follower of Jesus. It is the criterion of love.

If a person’s words, actions and the whole life are measured by the criterion of love and if she/he comes out successfully then only she/he is truly a disciple of Jesus. It is unimportant if a person is a Christian by name or a follower of some other religion. The most important thing is to be a known or unknown disciple of Jesus.

During his earthly life Jesus claimed to be one with his Father. He also promised his disciples to send on them the Holy Spirit from His Father. So for the Christians, Jesus with the Father and the Holy Spirit is one true God of love. Hence the Bible says, God is the God of love.

If a person recognizes this God of love or not, if his/her life is inspired and led by true love, then he/she is a disciple of Jesus,; s/he is an unknown Christian. To be a disciple of Jesus is not the monopoly of a Christian. The Christian do not have the sole possession of Jesus. Jesus belongs to one and all.

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