The 5th Sunday of Easter May18, 2025

In 1996, a car accident tore open the head of a 21-year-old Chicago man named Peter. Peter was gravely injured, in a deep coma with sustained brain damage. The doctors told Peter’s family and friends that he probably would not survive, and even if he did, he would always be in a comatose state.

One of the people who heard that frightening news was Linda, the girl Peter planned to marry. In the sad days that followed, Linda spent all her spare time in the hospital. Night after night, she would sit at Peter’s bedside, pat his cheek, rub his brow, and talk to him. All the while, Peter remained in a coma, unresponsive to Linda’s loving presence.

Night after night, for three and a half months, Linda sat at Peter’s bedside speaking words of encouragement to him, even though he gave no sign that he heard her. Then one night, Linda saw Peter move. A few nights later, she saw his eyelash flutter.

That was all she needed. Against the advice of the doctors, Linda quit her job and became Peter’s constant companion. More little signs of life began to appear. She spent her life savings on a swimming pool, hoping that the sun and water would restore life to Peter’s motionless body.

Then came the day when Peter spoke his first word since the accident. It was only a grunt, but Linda understood it. Gradually, with Linda’s help, those grunts turned into words, clear words. Finally, the day came when Peter was able to walk. It took two long years, but Peter could walk Linda down the aisle of Our Lady of Pompeii Church in Chicago. He had to use a walker, but he was walking. Every television station in Chicago covered the wedding, and newspapers across the country printed pictures of Linda and Peter. Today, Peter is living a normal life. He talks slowly, but clearly. He walks slowly, but without a walker. He and Linda even have a lovely child.

The story of Linda and Peter is a beautiful commentary on the words of Jesus in today’s Gospel: “I give you a new commandment; love one another as I have loved you. This is how all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

If there is one thing we need to do today, it is to rediscover the power of love. The kind of love that Jesus preached. Not the love we hear about in every song, or see on TV, where love is often used when they really mean lust. The problem with the word is that it is abused and overused, and it has lost its meaning.

The story of Linda and Peter illustrates the kind of love that Jesus was speaking of, sacrificial love. The kind that never tires of giving for the sake of the other. Giving until it hurts. A mother’s love. That kind of love has tremendous power, a miraculous power, power that brings people back from the brink of death. From hopeless sickness, to perfect health.

On the evening news, we witness injustices and violence. Killings in the streets of our cities. The strange thing is if you were to ask the people involved in the injustice, the violence and the killings what religion they were, most of them would say Christian. Which means a follower of Christ.

A Hindu in India once said, if you Christians were like your Christ and loved the way He told you to, you would convert India in five years. Many Christians just do not imitate Christ, the one we are supposed to follow. They do not imitate Him in the way He treated others, or in the way He loved, even His enemies.

It is not so difficult to imitate Christ. Think about this: if at any time in your life you have once done something that Jesus would have done, you have taken the first step. It is just a matter of repetition. Like many things worth doing, it takes practice. Some of us have to get good at being good.

St. Augustine once asked this question: what does love look like? Being a theologian, Augustine could have responded with a profundity that would tax the minds of most intellectuals, but he offered a much more practical challenge with the definition. He says, love has hands to help others. It has feet to hasten the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of others. That is what love looks like. You know he’s talking about us, right.

I would ask you to cast yourself back to the marriage feast of Cana. Remember what Mary told the waiters, and tells us? “Do whatever He tell you.” Today, He tells us, love as I have loved you. Not a suggestion, but a command.