


From the Gospel: A transgressive message of love – Fr Carlo Calleja

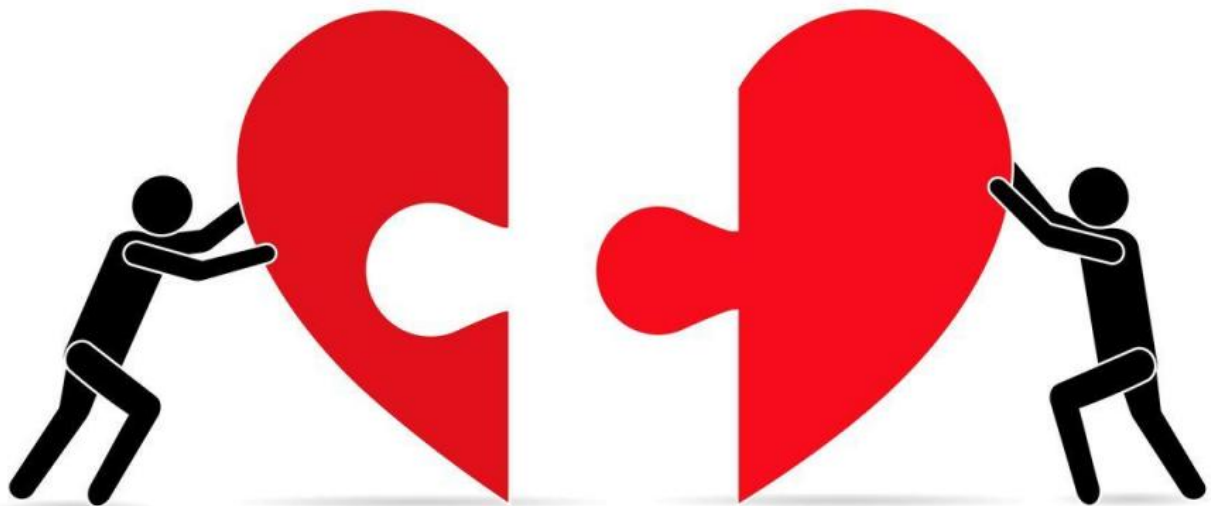
God's scandalous love for humankind surpasses all barriers

Community

Religion


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 3 min read



The Yahad report calls for a commitment to live a life that embraces the differences among us, and that binds wounds of hatred and division that have plagued Maltese society for far too long. Photo: Shutterstock.com

Seventh Sunday in ordinary time, Cycle C. Today's readings: 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; 1 Corinthians 15:45-49; Luke 6:27-38

Many who followed the popular Italian song festival Sanremo this year were left with mixed feelings. Italian singer Achille Lauro, known for his provocative style, poured 
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on his head on stage, in an act in which he appeared as though he was ‘baptising’ himself.

Lauro’s act created quite a stir. Italian social media was ablaze and divided over the act, that many described as scandalous and blasphemous. Pressed for its own view, the Vatican daily *L’Osservatore Romano*, however, had a completely different take, comparing Lauro’s transgressive mime with the much more transgressive message of the Gospel. “By wanting to be transgressive at all costs,” the editors wrote, “the singer has turned to the Catholic imagination. Nothing new. There has never been in history a message more transgressive than that of the Gospel.”

If there is a Gospel reading that fits the definition of transgressive, then today’s must be it. In what seems to be the ultimate expression of counterculture, Jesus calls on his followers to a behaviour, or rather an attitude, that violates all social norms and unwritten rules.

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Going even beyond the precepts laid down in the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus urges his listeners to “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well.”

Jesus's words are often interpreted as a user's manual of dos and don'ts to merit a seat in heaven. Such a reading misses the whole point. Rather, Jesus is describing an altogether new orientation of heart. It is the very stance of God's life and which he longs to share with his creatures.

Tribalism and vilification of 'the other' are two terms that accurately describe contemporary Maltese society, from partisan politics to village festas, not to mention racism and xenophobia. These attitudes expose how deeply ingrained in our psyche is the conviction that we are left to our own limited devices to navigate a world that seems to be dictated by the law of the jungle.

In contrast, in his letter to the community of Corinth, St Paul harps on the truth that although we have borne within us the image of the earthly one, Adam, through God's grace we shall also bear within us the image of the heavenly one, Jesus Christ. In other words, God is not out there to catch us when we are unable to do what appears beyond our reach, as sinful human beings. Instead, God is on our side, despite our limitations and fragility, pervading our life with his.

[Yahad](#), the report recently launched by the Justice and Peace Commission, makes a similar point. It calls for a renewed commitment on a personal and communal level to live a life not of division, exclusion and annihilation, but one that embraces the differences among us, and that binds wounds of hatred and division that have plagued Maltese society for far too long.

While reflecting on Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, from which is taken today's Gospel, African-American Baptist minister and civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr proposes that the kind of love expected of us by Jesus is the willingness to go to any length to restore the fabric of a frayed and tattered community.

In his essay *An Experiment in Love*, King proposes that this is the kind of love that is captured by the meaning of the Greek word *agape*. "It means overflowing love," affirms King, "which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative. It is not set in motion by any quality or function of its object. It is the love of God operating in the human heart."

Meanwhile, we yearn to sync with the rhythm of God's scandalous love for humankind that surpasses all barriers.