It has become the habit in our family to say, “I love you” at the end of phone calls and emails. I love these frequent reminders that I am valued and worthy of love, and I like the opportunity to remind my daughters and husband that they are the same. We underscore these reminders with little acts of love. Our daughters joke that my husband and I are the only parents they know who still date. And when we do go out, we take turns paying for the other’s dinner. My husband once sent me flowers when I didn’t get a job I had hoped for. It was a kind and thoughtful gesture.

In the Gospel, Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me” not once, but three times. When Peter responds positively (though progressively with more irritation), Jesus continues, “Feed my lambs...Tend my sheep...Feed my sheep.” It isn’t enough to say we love someone. We show it by caring for them and for who and what they cherish. The best way that Peter could show his love for Jesus was by caring for the people of God. He could love all the disciples and invite others to follow Jesus as well.

Pope Francis once exhorted priests to “be shepherds, with the ‘odor of the sheep.’” Jesus is telling Peter—and all of us—much the same thing. To love the Lord is to truly live among his people: to touch them, tell them and show them they are valuable and desired. This is the face of love.

All people deserve to know they are loved, but in our world that is not always the case. How might we respond?

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