“Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another.” (Rom 13:8) When Saint Paul wrote that line to those early Christians living in Rome, he obviously wasn’t familiar with the modern way of life, what with mortgages, car notes, credit card bills, tuition payments, gas and electric costs, cable, cell phone and internet expenses. “Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another”??? If only it was that easy, I want to say.

And yet, when it comes to my (or your) obituary, I doubt that anyone will be giving much attention to how I paid my bills, whether I was late with my payments, did I use cash, plastic or checks, and the like. It reminds me of someone who said that no one on their death bed has ever been known to say, “I wish I had spent more time at the office.” This is not to say that I’m in favor of not paying your bills.

But what gives meaning to our lives, what gives meaning to the life of the human family, is not the power, prestige, status or wealth that we accumulate in our lives, but the quality of the relationships we have with other human beings. When each of us and all of us look at each person we encounter with the belief that human life is sacred – every human life -- and when we respect the God-given dignity of each human person, then they will truly have something to talk about when our time is up.

“…for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” Countless obstacles throw themselves up in the path of our striving to love. It may be our own woundedness, our own personal pain that holds us back and keeps us from opening our hearts to others. It may be our busy-ness and all the tasks of daily life that blind us to the opportunities and the invitations to love. It could be the biases we pick up from family members and other influential people in our lives – that lead us to narrow-mindedness and prejudice that lead us to writing some people off as less human, less important, or less worthy of our attention, our respect, our compassion, our love.

There are people who don’t look like I do, don’t dress like I do, don’t talk like I do, don’t smell as good as I do, don’t make the money I do; there are people who have harmed others, there are people who have broken the law. And at times, I am inclined to discount them, to ignore them, to look down my nose at them. Even worse, when I have the power to do so, I sometimes want to get them out of my sight, get them out of my environment, get them as far away as possible from me, and exclude them from anything that qualifies them as human.

St. Paul is challenging us today to open our hearts and arms as wide as Christ on the cross. In another place, St. Paul points out that Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice of love – dying on the Cross – not for the worthy, not for the good, but for sinners, for you and me and all the rest of the world, every single human being. It was the innocent one that willingly opened his arms on the Cross in love for all of sinful, broken, needy humanity. It is he who invites to open our arms just as wide our sisters and brother in the human family.