

Fr James' homily for the Sixth Sunday of Easter 2021



First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 10: 25 - 48
Second Reading: First Letter of St John 4:7-10
Gospel: John 15: 9-17

As I mentioned last week, as the weeks of Easter go on, what we read in the scriptures are in a way like the ripples spreading out in a pond from the stone dropped in the centre - which is the resurrection of Jesus. Today in the letters of St John, and in his Gospel, we see the profound effects of the Resurrection in John, the “beloved disciple” and the timeless wisdom that he passes on to us...

John distils all he has learnt from Jesus in those words “God is love”. This is the fundamental truth, but so difficult to make our own. We are used to hearing the much repeated Islamic phrase *God is great*. This tells us something about God, but, when you think about it, not very much. When we say “God is love” we are not describing a part of what he is like, we are not describing attributes of his. We are saying this is who he is because this is how he shows himself to us. And, what is more wonderful, to say “God is love” leads us to the mystery of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit - for love is not abstract but must be alive and in relationship.

St John writes all he does to help us, who have not had his privilege to rest our heads upon the breast of God incarnate, to know God, which means to enter into his love, or, if you like, in the images of last week's Gospel, to allow Christ to make his home in us and ours in him.

So today we reflect on love. We live in a sentimental age and our ideas about love are often partial, sentimental and self-indulgent. Our experience of love is partial and changing. God, however, simply IS. He doesn't change his mind. He doesn't love you one moment and go off you the next. (St Thomas Aquinas was once asked “what does God do all day?” and he answered “He enjoys himself”! That doesn't mean he goes for a round of golf and watches TV with a beer in his hand...It means he simply IS delight and harmony and enjoyment. The point is he wants us to be a part of that and know it too.

As you can see, St John has distilled all my incoherent rambling into a few words. Read them in today's scriptures.

Next, he talks of “God's love for us”...this is the next big ripple of the resurrection for us to understand, and we so often forget. God loves us first. His love comes before anything we do or say. Remember again last week's Gospel. God wants to live

his life in you (*that started me to talk about how the sacraments work and we will return to that discussion in coming weeks*). When we understand this it truly set us free. Free from all the games we play saying to ourselves that if we pray hard enough or do enough good things etc God will love us more.

It sets us free. Yes, says St John, free to take today's Gospel into our hearts. Free to answer Christ's demand to love in the way required of us. Love, says Jesus, as I have loved you. Not in a partial or sentimental or changing way, but as God loves - steadily and sacrificially working for what is right and good for ourselves and others.

That, in a rather clumsy way, describes the challenge and adventure of being a disciple of Jesus. Jesus, the Risen Lord, demands that everything about us be open to change in accordance with what our faith demands of us (*more about the sacraments mould and shape us could come here if there were time*). We know in a limited way how the loves of this world can do that. St John is telling us that the resurrection of Jesus means we can know infinitely more. This he says, in the midst of all else that the life of this world is, is joy, and complete joy at that.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.