

6th Sunday of Easter (B)

6th May 2018

'Love ... As I have loved you'

Acts 10: *The Holy Spirit has been poured out on the pagans* Ps 97: *The Lord has shown His salvation to the nations* 1Jn 4: *God is love* Jn 15: 9–17: *A man can have no greater love than to lay down His life for His friends.*

We are inundated today with the word “love” in the readings: 9 times each, in the 1Jn second reading and in the Gospel reading also from John, we have that word, “love.” A word, some may think, that is over-used. We use it in all sorts of silly, everyday contexts — “Oh, I really loved that pasta!” — but which, if we are honest, has a timeless, deep meaning that has no replacement. St John goes so far as to say, simply, “God is love.” It’s a phrase that could hardly be shorter or more pithy. Yet it expresses the deepest reality of all, the most powerful statement about the entire universe’s existence: “God is love.”

When Our Lord speaks to His apostles at the Last Supper, as He is preparing to enter into the night of His Passion and the day of His Crucifixion, He uses umpteen times over that same word, “love.” “A man can have no greater love, than to lay down His life for His friends.” But in this case, that man who is very soon to lay down His life

is also the Son of God. He shows us just what is the perfect way to love, not looking to save His own mortal life, but to give it up as a sacrifice, to save others — to save us. So, when Jesus says, “A give you a new commandment, ‘love one another as I have loved you’,” He is not just instructing us to love in any old way, but to love with that sacrificial love that puts others first, as He put the salvation of mankind before His own self-preservation. I think that we most respond in love *to* God when we are aware deep in our souls of the love *of* God. We need that time and space for prayer, for reflection, to know that love of God that has created all things, given me my life, blessed me in countless ways, seen me through the sadnesses and tough times in life. All this is the work of God, who “is love.” And when we have let that realisation sink in, when we let that love of God touch us deep down, that’s when we are ready to give our whole lives to loving Him. This is an eternal thing, as all true love is ... “As the Father has loved Me,” says Jesus, “so I have loved you. Remain in My love.” This is a lifetime’s work, a devotion to God that we work at year in,

year out, to our dying day. There is nothing more blessed than to live all our days in perfect love of our Saviour, and come to the end of our lives knowing that despite failures we have kept the faith. “Remain in my love,” He instructs us: “If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love.” We can only be said to be fully responding to God’s love if we do keep His commandments. If we truly love Him, we will want to keep His commandments; we will not want to be wayward, or distant from Him, but close, and holy, and good. This beautiful choice, to love God with all our lives, makes a human life the greatest thing that it can be, a truly sacrificial offering to Him; and when we offer our lives to God in this way, we will find that we are then offering our lives in the service of others; and we will also find a deeper peace in a life having sense and purpose. There is no point in our throwing our lives away chasing after the ephemeral and passing things of this world; we can enjoy the good things of this world that God has given us, but constantly referring our thanks for those things back to Him. We can enjoy the landscape, the music, the brilliance

of artists and scientists, the love of friends and of family ... but all these gifts in creation are but aspects of the universal love of God that has placed these things in the world for our benefit. Above all, then we have to give thanks to God, for His overarching love. And we human beings, then, are being perfectly what we were meant to be when we sink to our knees and adore the God of all things.

As we draw towards the latter part of this sacred Easter season, then, let’s allow these beautiful words of our Saviour to invite us, to draw us, closer to His heart. There is nothing more life-giving than the Saviour’s love for us. When He came back from the dead, as Easter constantly celebrates, He proved once more how ongoing is His love for, how undying. Even when — as we shall celebrate this Thursday — He ascended and returned to the right hand of the Father in His Kingdom, that love of His continued to be poured out upon us, in the limitless grace of the Holy Spirit. So then, this whole Easter season is a joyful reminder of the power of God’s love ... “God’s love for us when He sent His Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away.”