

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Gospel: John 15:9-17

Jesus said to his disciples,

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you.”

REFLECTION 1:

‘AND YET MORE LOVE’

Shortly after my ordination to the priesthood in May 1957, my Archbishop, John Charles McQuaid gave me my first appointment. I was to be chaplain to the Sisters of Christian Education at Rathnew, where the nuns had a newly appointed secondary school for girls. There was a curate attached to Rathnew in the parish of Wicklow at the time, Fr. Patrick Lavelle. Fr. Paddy, as he was popularly known, was just 57 years old and awaiting an appointment as parish priest. Fr. Paddy was gifted with a winning smile matched by an open and warm heart. Soon after making myself known to him he took me under his wing and it was in his Church of St. Brigid, that I heard my first confessions. He also guided me through the sacrament of baptism, allowed me to do some house calls to the elderly and generally gave me wise counsel. Having only a motor scooter and living on a slender stipend at the time, Fr. Paddy invited me in his car on my first holiday as a priest to Pontoon in his native Co. Mayo. Our friendship continued over the following years while Fr. Paddy was parish priest of Barndarrig and Malahide, eventually retiring to live with his sister in Bray. His sister died shortly afterwards and Fr. Paddy was left on his own with his faithful housekeeper, Ann. I was glad to be able to return his kindness by looking after his affairs, doing bits and bobs for him as advancing years challenged his mobility. While in Bray, Fr. Paddy surprised us by writing his first book’ an epic poem entitled ‘AND YET MORE LOVE’. The book hit the bookstalls like a storm. Fr. Robbie Nash S.J. in his weekly column in The Sunday Press devoted one whole article in praise of this masterpiece. Even the booksellers, Gill and Son, set aside the whole front window of their O’Connell Street store, displaying this unique contribution from the pen of the humble priest.

This brings us to today’s Gospel reading from St. John, which could also be entitled ‘And yet more love’. After the parable of the vine and the branches of last Sunday, Jesus ‘when the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father’, now speaks more clearly about the fruit that the vine must bear. Jesus speaks of love. The Father has loved his Son, who in obedience was made man in order to save the world – obedient to death, death on a cross. Jesus was highly exalted to the glory of the Father in whose love he dwells. Because he loves the Father and shares his love for the world, he gave his life for us. He has chosen us as his friends, even before we have made the slightest movement towards him. He has made known to us everything he has learned from the Father – simply put, ‘God is love’.

Now Jesus waits for only one thing from us – our loving response, shown in faithfulness to his commandments which can be summarised, ‘Love one another as I have loved you’. Jesus says this because every commandment flows from love alone. All of his precepts are really only one and this

sole foundation is that of charity. Just as the trees' branches all come from the same root, so are all the virtues born of charity alone. The branch of any good work cannot stay green, if it is separated from the root of charity. The Lord's commands are at the same time, many and one – many in the various good works but one in the root of love.

How can we keep this love? The Lord himself tells us through most of the wisdom of the Gospels. He orders his followers to love one another in him and to love their enemies because of him and whoever loves his friend in God and his enemy because of God possesses true charity. A great many men and women devote their lives in this world to the services of their fellow human beings. Fr. Patrick Lavelle, poet and priest, who lived from 1900 to 1994, was one decent Christian I was privileged to meet. He lived out his life, as his book was entitled – 'And yet more love'.

REFLECTION 2: JESUS LOVES ME

Karl Barth (1886-1968) is often regarded as the greatest Protestant theologian of the 20th century. He actively opposed Hitler and the Nazi regime and vigorously attempted to prevent the Nazis from establishing a state church run by the regime. On one occasion Barth was spending an evening with a number of friends. Curious to know his thinking, one of those present asked him, 'What is the most profound thought that ever entered your mind?' After a brief moment of reflection Barth replied 'the most profound thought I have ever known is the simple truth: Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so'. Indeed each of the readings for today imparts the same truth - God loves us, Jesus loves us. Is there any thought more profound?

In today's first reading from Acts (10: 25-48) we see Peter slowly growing into the realization that God is impartial and does not discriminate. God loves and accepts all who stand in awe before God regardless of their race, gender, social status, age or background. Peter was able to grasp something of God's universal saving plan for all humankind. When others questioned Peter's actions and criticised his openness to gentiles, he defended himself. 'If then God gave them the same gift he gave to us when we came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to be able to hinder God?'

In today's second reading St. John speaks frankly about love. Love is of God: God is love. God's act of sending Jesus Christ into the world makes known what love is. We can readily grasp this statement because it speaks of love in terms we can readily understand. Every parent's gut-wrenching fear - the loss of a child brings home to us God's love. This is the same God who said 'Even if a mother forgets her child, I will never forget you. See on the palms of my hand I have written your name (Isaiah 49: 15-16). John was so convinced of God's love that he made his point again and again, trying to convince the members of his community and his readers through the centuries that God is love. Those who truly know God will love others, and that love will witness to the world of the presence of God among us - to keep the commandments to love one another; to go and bear fruit and to ask the Father for anything in his name - all this that we might know joy. Julian of Norwich (1342-1423) said that the 'greatest honour one can give to God is to live in joy because of the knowledge of God's love. If our joy gives honour to God, then it is our duty to be joyful'.

In a survey, people were asked what they want most from life. The overwhelming response was that they just wanted to be happy and that true happiness comes from doing things for others. In today's Gospel, Jesus says, 'Love one another as I have loved you'. And in those words we are given the formula for our own happiness - not just here and now, but in the hereafter as well.