

Sixth Sunday of Easter May 01, 2016

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29; Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23; John 14:23-29

The love of God is universal, reaching out to everyone. The Holy Bible gives account of God's love to humanity from the foundation of the world. John in his writing defines God as love. Such an affirmation is simple and absolute. Initial knowledge of divine Love begins with opening Sacred Scripture and discovering the Creator who finds joy in his creation. Nonetheless, to enter into this mystery and truly understand it requires more than intellectual knowledge. To know that God is love requires our participation in his divine love. Authentic knowledge of God is only born in a simple heart that is open and attentive to him. Ultimately, this knowledge of God, of divine Love, is a personal experience. Man's response to divine Love establishes a communion between the Lover and the beloved that results in peace and mutual benevolence. We are invited today to live the Easter Spirit in calmness and peace and reassurance that we all need so much. He tells them that he is ready to give them Peace which he will leave with them. He gives them his own peace. The peace he gives is much different from the peace that the world will give them for he is unique and he is concerned about them. He reassures them that although he going away from them he will still be with them till the end.

First Reading of today begins with some Jews taking extreme position that the members of the church should hold traditional position for the salvation. The passage tells us that the Christian spirit does not come by itself. One has to strive towards it by seeking the Divine Will of God and then by embracing the final decision of the authority of the Church. The apostolic leadership is crucial in such situations. In the early days of the Church, certain individuals came down from Judea and taught that unless one was circumcised according to the custom of Moses, he could not be saved. Seeking the Divine Will of God on the matter, Paul, Barnabas and some of the others were sent to Jerusalem to consult the apostles and the elders. Consequently the Church authority made a decision on the matter and sent Barnabas and Silas to report back to the believers. Through these progressive actions is seen the Christian spirit at work. To walk in the Christian spirit also involves the embracing of certain characteristics. The first, and the most important, is the attribute of unity, all the members being of one spiritual mind. Through unity, there is harmony. Through harmony, there is strength. Through strength, there is perseverance in the living faith.

And in the end, those who are joined in the Christian spirit, they achieve their goal, eternal life and salvation through Jesus Christ.

Today's Second Reading tells us that the Christian spirit at work through some of the descriptive words that are given to us. John saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. Here we are able to perceive the unity of the people under One God, the Lamb. The Lord God and the Lamb is the Temple and provide the light that far outshines the light of Sun and Moon. There are no idols. Nor are there any man-made religions anywhere. We also perceived the people's quality of holiness because they all belonged to the city of Jerusalem which is a holy city. Jerusalem comes as a holy city from heaven where there are the foundations of the twelve tribes of Israel is laid. Jerusalem was the God's choice for his dwelling. In the Holy of Holies he dwelt on the wings of the Cherubim which surrounded the Ark of the Covenant. Connected with it are twelve angels, twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve Apostles. There is continuity in God's plan, beginning with heaven, passing through the Old and New Testaments and returning to heaven.

According to the Gospel of John, the way one loves Jesus is by being in relationship with both him and his Father. The relationship serves as a dwelling or home for the disciples. However it is not something abstract. The relationship comes into being through the disciples keeping the words of Jesus. This means doing the works of Jesus by keeping his commandments. Doing this will assure the abiding presence of God the Father and Jesus within the community. This presence will serve as both the foundation and the result of the community's love. All of this Jesus made known to the disciples while he was physically present with them. Jesus now promises them that the Father will send them the Spirit, the Advocate or Paraclete in the name of Jesus for the specific purpose of reminding the disciples what Jesus had taught them. This is the only place in John where the advocate is referred to as the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand that the purpose of the Advocate is not to teach the disciples anything new. The mission of the Holy Spirit is to make sure the community activity remembers what Jesus has already taught them.

The words of this Sunday's Gospel were spoken by Jesus just before his departure to Heaven: the "departure" that he accomplished on the wood of the Cross. Jesus teaches his disciples, he prepares them for the coming

separation; above all, he prepares them for a better future. For his "departure" will be beneficial to all the people. But, in order for this future to be better, there is a condition: we must love Jesus. If they love Jesus, then the Father will come into them along with the Son and also the Holy Spirit. But what is it to love Jesus? Quite simply, to love Jesus is to love one's brothers and sisters, to love one's neighbour. St Paul clearly tells us that Jesus himself is "the first-born among many brethren" (Rm. 8:29). If we truly love Jesus our brother, then we will want nothing other than his happiness, his glory, his eternal peace. After his "departure" to Heaven, Jesus does not return immediately. He will return to earth in the fullness of time, meaning, at the end of time. Meanwhile, with the Father, he sends his Holy Spirit to the disciples. The Holy Spirit helps them to be patient and waiting to prepare for the coming of Jesus and the Father. There is only one means that can incite this desire: that of placing in our memory, by the power of the grace of God, the image and the almost complete outline of what Jesus truly is as the Son of the Father, namely, the human words of the Son of God or the Word of the Father.

The Gospel of today tells us of the Christian unity in those who obeyed the command of Jesus. This is directly applicable to the disciples as it is applied to us today. Jesus explains to them that those who love him sincerely will keep his word, and the Father of Jesus will love them, and they will come to them and make their home within them." The fact that God loves humanity and comes and makes his dwelling here on earth is a great blessing. This is the longing of every Christian to have God dwelling in their heart and therefore Jesus says where two or three are gathered in his name, he is present there with them. Those who love Jesus, they are of one spiritual mind with the others who also obey the command of the Lord. If we only had those words from Jesus and nothing else, they would be enough to guide every Christian through life and point them in the right direction. United in one Faith in the Lord Jesus, the Disciples of Christ are gathered here to adore and worship our Lord, our God. In the Catholic spirit, we are united to receive the blessings that are bestowed upon those who receive the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist that is the Living Bread. For Jesus, love, by which he means loving, is achieved by "keeping his word". The "word" of Jesus must not be limited to what we were taught as "commandments" or "doctrines" or moral behaviour, but embraces everything we know about him through the Scripture - his words, his actions, his relationships with people of all kinds, the guiding principles of his life, his values and attitudes.

Here for the first time in John, Jesus promises his disciples the gift of Peace. This is not the same kind of peace spoken of a secular culture. It is not the absence of conflict or the presence of world harmony. At its very core the peace of Jesus is his very love which derives from the wholeness of his life. This does not mean that the disciples will have a free sailing from now on. What it does mean is that with the gift of the peace of Jesus the disciples will be equipped and fortified with what they need to face the world when Jesus leaves. Jesus had told the disciples all this because he is going to leave them and return to the Father. If they have understood what he has told them and if they really love him, then they will surely know why he has to leave and will rejoice in his going. But he makes it clear that when they do not do all things in the spirit, their hearts will be troubled. They are afraid because deep inside they know that they are in disobedience and the Wrath of God is pending. The peace of Christ comes when obediently people submit themselves to God's Divine Will through the authority of the Church. Then there is no longer any reason to be troubled or afraid. Jesus gave peace which is secure in the midst of difficulties and storms. He himself showed the disciples how they could be peaceful in the midst of the storm in the sea and he was sleeping quietly. He gave his peace to be shared with others.

We all are aware that peace is vital to us. We continue to consider external peace in special ways at times. Problems of internal peace such as undue anxiety, scrupulosity we consider all the time. Jesus made peace an important part of his last lessons the night before he died. He said that he was giving his gift of peace and not as the world gives that peace. His peace is lasting forever. The world means with peace the absence of war. It is a state of being left alone or not being burdened by undue worries or financial burdens. The peace that Jesus gives is active and builds up the mind, a disposition of the benevolence. But he calls his disciples to work for that peace and it has to be active and effective one. Thus the essential requirement of this peace is Love. Therefore Jesus says whoever loves me, keeps my word. The presence of Jesus itself was love.

Today's Gospel reading from St John made reference to the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father would send in His Name. Such was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Lord Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon His disciples. At that moment, the official ministry of the Holy Spirit had its

beginning on earth. In making known to us the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is twofold. The first goal is to build up the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Visible in nature with its seat in Rome, its invisible reflection is the holy city with its seat in Jerusalem where the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church had its beginning. The unity of the two forms the mystical Body of Christ, the Church also being known as the Bride of Christ. The second goal is to sanctify us in Christ so we may be purified and transformed in the likeness of Jesus.

Jesus promised us the Paraclete, the third person of the Godhead, to help give God's peace to us. The word Paraclete is also translated as Advocate and is explained as comforter. But the Paraclete does more than to comfort. He is the mediator, defence attorney, the one who stands by us in time of need. When in difficulty he is always there with us to support guide and help. What the lawyer does for pay, the Paraclete does for love. As the Jesuit poet Hopkins said, the Paraclete is the one who cheers, who encourages, who persuades, who exhorts, who stirs up, who urges forward, and who calls on. A Paraclete is zealous that we should do the good and leads us with assurance and strength, encouraging us and guiding every step we take. Paraclete works at the human and divine level. It was said that Nathaniel Hawthorne went home one evening to tell his wife that he had lost his job at the custom house. She surprised him with joy and told him now is the time he can write his book. She told him that he was talented and all her life she had wished that he would do it. But he asked her on what they would survive in the meantime. She opened the drawer and showed him the weekly savings she had made from the household expense money and that would take them through the year. The result was the book *Scarlet Letters*. This is what the advocate would do in our life.

Today in all of today's three readings is that we are called to do all things in the spirit. Jesus said, "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." We ask the grace that we may be true to him and faithful in our response to the calling of the Spirit. Jesus wants us to have his peace and share it with others. But before we share with others we ourselves must enjoy this peace. He wants us to remember that if we are ill at ease in ourselves we cannot obtain his peace. Thomas Merton says: "If you are yourself at peace, then there is at least some peace in the

world.” Again Jesus calls us to be the path-finders in the world of today as in the early church and wants us to be light bearers in the world. We have the Holy Spirit to inspire us and guide us and he will show us the necessary path particularly in these days of storms and struggles. Founded on the faith of the Apostles, the Christians of every age, like you and me, are called by the Holy Spirit to put their faith in the words of the Lord. Then, the Father will come, and Jesus with him: all will be but one in God and the Peace of the Lord will reign everywhere.

The old Master instructed the unhappy young man to put a handful of salt in a glass of water and then to drink it. "How does it taste?" the Master asked. "Awful," spat the apprentice. The Master chuckled and then asked the young man to take another handful of salt and put it in the lake. The two walked in silence to the nearby lake and when the apprentice swirled his handful of salt into the lake, the old man said, "Now drink from the lake." As the water dripped down the young man's chin, the Master asked, "How does it taste?" "Good!" remarked the apprentice. "Do you taste the salt?" asked the Master. "No," said the young man. The Master sat beside this troubled young man, took his hands, and said, "The pain of life is pure salt; no more, no less. The amount of pain in life remains the same, exactly the same. But the amount we taste the 'pain' depends on the container we put it into. So when you are in pain, the only thing you can do is to enlarge your sense of things..... Stop being a glass. Become a lake!"

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