

Sunday 17 May 2020 Sixth Sunday of Easter

COLLECT God our redeemer, you have delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of your Son: grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life, so by his continual presence in us he may raise us to eternal joy; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING Acts 17:22-31. Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

PSALM 66:7-18 R [Bless our God, you peoples;] let the sound of his praise be heard. Bless our God, you peoples; make the voice of his praise to be heard. Who holds our souls in life, and will not allow our feet to slip. **R** For you, O God, have proved us; you have tried us just as silver is tried. You brought us into the snare; you laid heavy burdens upon our backs. You let enemies ride over our heads; we went through fire and water; but you brought us out into a place of refreshment. **R** I will enter your house with burnt offerings and will pay you my vows, which I promised with my lips and spoke with my mouth when I was in trouble. I will offer you sacrifices of fat beasts with the smoke of rams; I will give you oxen and goats. **R** Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for me. I called out to him with my mouth, and his praise was on my tongue. If I had found evil in my heart, the Lord would not have heard me; **R** But in truth God has heard me; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer, nor withheld his love from me. **R**

SECOND READING 1 Peter 3:13-22. Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

GOSPEL John 14:15-21. Jesus said to his disciples: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live,

you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

POST COMMUNION God our Father, whose Son Jesus Christ gives the water of eternal life: may we thirst for you, the spring of life and source of goodness, through him who is alive and reigns, now and for ever

Sunday Homily 17 MAY 2020 6th SUNDAY OF EASTER

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” John 14:15

Most of us have seen the type of picture which can be looked at in two ways. One famous example is of the profile of a haggard old woman, with a big hooked nose and lots of wrinkles. Unless you know that there’s another way of viewing this picture, all you will see is the ugly old woman. Even when someone tells you that it is possible to see something completely different – a full-length picture of a beautiful young woman – it’s not always easy to make it out. However, once you see it, once it falls into place, it’s hard to imagine how you could ever have missed it. Indeed, often it can be difficult to make out the original picture of the old woman.

The Christians of today’s Gospel faced a similar problem with regard to the rest of the world. Everyone knew that Jesus had been crucified and had died – that much could be seen by all. But the first Christians insisted that this was not the full story. There was much more to it than that. Though the world could not see Jesus, his followers believed that he was with them still – that he had not left them orphans – because, as he had promised, he had sent his Spirit to help them, to guide them, to console them, and to remind them of his teachings. Most of all, the Holy Spirit was simply present with them, and had made his home with them. He helped them to believe, and he helped them to work out their belief through their love for others. We can imagine their sense of frustration that the world around them did not understand their experience, and simply could not see things in the way that they could. They saw the same picture but interpreted it very differently. In many ways, we face a similar situation to those early Christians. We live in a world that is either hostile or simply indifferent to the Gospel message. Many people, even people of obvious goodwill, fail to see the importance of Christ for humanity, and are ready to dismiss as wishful thinking any claims of having a spiritual life or an experience of God. For many, life is a meaningless span of years, which they try to make as painless as possible until death finally puts an end to it.

How are we to respond to this view of life? Jesus’ answer to his disciples is still valid today: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” He summed up the commandments by saying that the most important thing is to love God with our whole hearts and to love our neighbours as ourselves. If you want to know how to live as a Christian you would do well to concentrate your thoughts on those two central commandments. Because following Christ is not about being very religious – anyone can be religious but that doesn’t mean they love either God or anyone else. We are called, even commanded, to love – but you cannot love what you don’t know. We need to get to know God, and to love him with all our hearts. People who truly do so find that love for others, and a right love for themselves, flow naturally from them. Loving as Jesus loved means asserting the value of every single individual, working to build up the community, and leading a life of loving service, even if it may cost us dearly. When Christians live as Christ commanded, we offer the world an alternative and more enduring vision of what life can be for those who are willing to accept the Spirit of truth and to allow him into their hearts. We cannot force people to do this. We cannot make them see the truth. The old proverb says, “You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink” – not until the horse understands what water is and understands and acknowledges that he is thirsty. But if we love in the way Jesus commands, then we demonstrate the reality of the Christ we believe in, and our world will be continually confronted by Christ and his Gospel, and will be able to look again and to decide. Then some will see a different picture of Jesus and will accept his offer of eternal life. And they will understand it not as a list of tenets of religion, but as a living relationship of love.

EASTER 6 2020

In spite of fast-food the instinct to gather together to eat on important and special occasions has not left us entirely. “Tradition” in respect of family, social and community meals often holds fast; often we refer to “holding on religiously”. Most great religions do indeed celebrate great festivals with food and drink. Significant then that Jesus takes the Passover Feast, when the people of Israel remembered Moses and their deliverance from slavery, as the occasion to institute the sacrificial meal of the Eucharist to keep His memory. And it is not just nostalgic recalling what Jesus said and did, but believing, knowing, that He is fulfilling His promise not to leave us as orphans- to be ever present.

Matthew, Mark and Luke document the Last Supper, telling of Jesus transforming bread and wine into His Body and Blood; it is St John though who treats us to the lengthy conversation of the Lord with the disciples in the course of the meal. Five chapters are devoted to that discourse ending with prayer to the Father centring on us all “being one”

In today’s Gospel we are in the early part of the conversation where Jesus encourages them to enter into the relationship He has with the Father. The key is the gift of the Spirit who enables us to see what is happening. Reflecting on what we are being invited to consider, we find it amazing. We are invited to dine with God and thereby share the life of God. As through the Spirit Christ was conceived in Mary, so now the Spirit will continue to make Him present, so He may live in us; through the Eucharist we become the body of Christ.

Through the centuries much spirituality has concentrated our personal relationship with God; today the emphasis moves towards, not just that relationship, or with one another, but with the whole of creation. Christ’s salvation is not limited; it is for all time, all persons and the whole of creation. Philip reaches out to the people of a Samaritan town; he is followed up by Peter and John who impart the gift of the Spirit. The gift enables the Samaritans to understand what God is doing for them.

When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ at communion, we are not just nurturing our personal relationship with Christ and the Father. Through the gift of the Eucharist we are able to recognise that it is an open invitation; therefore, we are united with all our sisters and brothers who gather about the altar and with all who have gone before us in the faith and hope of eternal life. This reminds us of how significant is our devotion to the saints. When you experience a young mother with a terminal illness begging for her daughter to make her First Holy Communion before she dies, you see Christ’s gift and promise in a whole new light. You understand more clearly what the Lord is offering us; how we are indeed all one with Him and the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. Seeing the daughter come forward to receive Holy Communion after her mother’s death makes the promise of Jesus even more poignant: “I will not leave you orphans.”

Spend some time today reflecting on the wonderful gift that is ours and how in the Eucharist we are also caught up in the promise of Jesus, made just before today’s Gospel passage (heard last Sunday); that He is going to prepare a place for us and that in His Father’s house there are many rooms.