

Sunday Homily

6th SUNDAY OF EASTER

22 MAY 2022

YEAR C

“Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

John 14:23

Illustration

“What the world needs now, is love, sweet love. It’s the only thing that there’s just too little of,” goes the song. But definitions of love are many and varied. “Actions speak louder than words” and “it’s the thought that counts” seem to have diametrically opposed ways of judging love, for example. Does love have to be proved with actions, or are thoughts without any visible outcome enough?

Gospel Teaching

On the face of it, Jesus’ definition would seem to lean towards the former. He says, “Those who love me will keep my word”, and he doesn’t seem to mean just preserve it in a glass case to be viewed occasionally but never used. Jesus’ followers “kept his word” by active witness to the world, often at the cost of their own lives.

But what today’s Gospel passage has to say about love doesn’t stop there. The love that Jesus requires from his disciples does involve obedience, just as Jesus’ own love for God requires obedience on his part. The whole of these “Farewell Discourses” in John 13–17 is full of the knowledge of what Jesus is about to do, in obedience to his love for God. But it is all too easy only to see the obedience and not to see that it is born out of love. Jesus goes to the cross not out of fearful obedience to a God who demands it of him, but because he loves his Father, and he knows that he is loved by the Father. Jesus’ death is a joint decision, a shared action, accepted by Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not imposed by a stern God on a helpless victim.

Now, as Jesus gets ready to leave his disciples, it is this basis in love that he wants them to understand. When the disciples, out of obedience and love, keep Jesus’ words, they will find that they are sharing in the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who will come and “make our home with them”. The disciples will only be able to keep Jesus’ words because they know that they are loved by Jesus, just as Jesus is able to carry out his earthly mission because he knows he is the beloved Son of the Father. Jesus calls his disciples friends, not servants, because they act with him, out of shared love and understanding, not just out of blind obedience.

And always with them is the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. St Augustine calls the Holy Spirit “the bond of love”, the one who makes love real, strong, a force that can hold people together, even in hardship, adversity and death. Jesus does not promise that this will make everything easy for his disciples. Quite the contrary. He is perfectly frank in telling them that they may well be called to share his own fate. Is there, perhaps, a touch of irony as he tells them that the peace he is giving them won't bear much resemblance to the kind of peace that the world offers? If you want a religion of prosperity and harmony, one that will lead you to a quiet and revered old age, one that will allow you to view the world with quiet detachment and enjoyment, don't choose this one, Jesus seems to say. The peace Jesus offers is the peace of loving companionship every step of the way, and the peace of knowing that they are doing the will of the Father, as Jesus did.

Application

Although we are often called to walk in obedience, without fully understanding why God asks us to do what we have to do, still we must never forget that we are friends, not slaves. We are called to witness to the love of God in Christ Jesus, and we do this not only with words but also with our lives, and particularly with our lives together, in our friendship, shared and offered. We live as people with whom God has come and made his home, and now we have a home to offer to the lonely and homeless world. We don't have a manual for mission, or a set of forms to complete, but a life to live in God's world. And everywhere we go, we take our own strange peace, which the world won't always understand, unless it longs for friendship with God, and catches a glimpse, in us, of what it is like to be at home.