

Sixth Sunday of Easter: John 14:15-21

In today's Gospel passage we have part of the farewell discourse of Jesus during the last supper. In these last hours with his apostles he spoke about essentials. Many of the things he said were naturally directed towards the future, at how he wanted them to live when he was gone. One of the things he said to them was: **If you love me, keep my commandments**".

We are not talking about keeping a specific set of commandments but rather about following his way of life. What is involved here is Christian discipleship. We can't truly call ourselves disciples of Jesus if we don't listen to his words and make an effort to live by them. One wouldn't be much of a Christian if one didn't try to live as Jesus taught.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments." You could hear this saying of Jesus the wrong way. You could hear it like imagining Jesus shaking his finger at his disciples and telling them that if they really, really loved him they would do what he tells them to do. Sounds more like blackmail than friendship. Something like a friend to another friend. "Look, if you say you love me, then you'll do this for me". But Jesus is not saying "If you love me you will keep my commandments" that way. He is saying that, if you are inspired by my love for you, the way I treated you, then this is the way you will just naturally treat others.

We must be clear about one thing. **We don't keep his commandments so that he will love us; we keep his commandments because he loves us.** During that same supper Jesus said, 'Love one another as I have loved you.' It was he who first loved the apostles, and loved them unconditionally.

The greatest need each one of us has is for real, unconditional love. Yet we find it hard to believe that this is how God loves us. We tend to believe that God will love us only if we are good. God loves us, not because we are good, but because he is good. Our very existence is a sign of God's love. God's unconditional love for us is the Good News. Our response is to try to return that love.

Jesus knew that the Father loved him. He responded by loving the Father. He showed his love for the Father through his obedience, even though that obedience cost him his life. And it is through obedience that we are to show our love for Jesus. What does this mean in practice? It means listening to his word and putting it in action. To love is to obey. And to obey is to love.

There are those who proclaim their love for Jesus in words, but who deny him in their deeds or by their way of life. Real love is shown in deeds. People know us by our acts, not by what we say with our lips.

It's not easy to live as a disciple of Jesus in the modern world. It never was an easy thing. But for that reason Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit. When we are weak we must pray to the Spirit. The Spirit comforts us in times of sorrow, enlightens us in times of darkness, and makes us brave and strong in times of weakness.

The word Jesus used for the Spirit is the word 'Advocate', a legal term for one who supports a defendant at a trial. The Spirit will be the great defender of the disciples in time of trial. And the follower of Jesus can expect to suffer. But, as St Peter says (Second Reading today), it is better to suffer for doing the right thing than for doing the wrong thing. Knowing that our cause is right gives us great strength. Besides, we have the example of Christ who, though innocent, suffered and died for our sins.

The apostles knew that Jesus loved them. And we know that Jesus loves us too. There is no mistaking love. You feel it in your heart. It is like a flame that warms your soul, energizes your spirit and supplies passion to your life. Love is our connection to God and to each other. Love is the climate in which the Christian lives. **'Love one another as I have loved you.' That sums it all up.**