

## Gift of God's Love (6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter)

*A reading from the holy Gospel according to John: (Jn. 15: 9-17)*

Jesus said to his disciples:

"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete.

This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you.

A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I shall not call you servants any more, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father.

You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last; and then the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. What I command you is to love one another."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

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- Easter time will soon be over. Next Sunday we shall be celebrating the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord into heaven, and the Sunday after, the Feast of the Holy Spirit. With the feast of Pentecost, Easter time will come to an end.

- During this time, Sunday after Sunday, the Church presented us afresh with one or other of the many gifts that Jesus brought to mankind at his resurrection:

Today, the sixth Sunday in Easter time, we are presented with the gift at the basis of all others, the **gift of Jesus' love**.

I am sure "love" is a term that catches everyone's attention very fast. *Love is the source of all genuine joy... it is transformative... changes people... gives meaning and purpose to our existence... the great misery/poverty is not lack of material things but having no one to love, to be abandoned by all.*

God knows that. That is why He offers His love. You may doubt about everything in the world; but there is one thing of which you can be absolutely certain: that God loves you!

- The Gospel of this Sunday is a continuation of that of last Sunday in which Jesus compared himself to a tree of which we are the branches. Jesus told us that cut off from him we are doomed, just as branches are bound to wither and to die if cut off from the tree. The same can be said of love: there cannot be genuine love within us unless we keep intimately united to Christ.

Let us briefly examine the incredible statement Jesus makes in today's Gospel: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you ... .. love one another as I have loved you." (Jn. 15, 9.12)

- We can notice here three steps: a first step leading from the Father to Jesus, a second from Jesus to us, and a third from us to our neighbour.

God's love is like a stream continuously flowing from the Father to Jesus, and from Jesus to us. We should be careful not to interrupt its flow but to let it pass from us to those around us. From our neighbour, the stream goes back to God, since it is God whom we love when bestowing our love on our neighbour. "If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love" (Jn. 15: 10).

- Whatever Jesus did in life was in fulfilment of his Father's plans for him. All his Father wanted was that he should open the way to salvation to everyone. It cost him his life to carry out his Father's will but fulfil it he did.

- Jesus in turn gave us a single command: "What I command you is to love one another" (Jn. 15: 17)

Jesus might give the reason for his command as follows: You are now God's children; you should start learning to love the way my Father loves. No one, not even the most wicked among men is excluded from his love. As long as a person lives in this world my Father will keep on loving him or her, whatever his or her response to my Father's love may be.

If my Father loves even those who offend him, should we not also love everyone, even those who offend us?

*Jesus said: "You are my friends. You did not choose me, no, I chose you and I commissioned you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last" (Jn. 15: 14.16)*

*It is consoling indeed to hear it from Jesus' own lips: we are his friends. I know how valuable and precious friends are! My faith in Jesus means a lot to me now.*

Actually, we are more than friends; we are his own brothers. We belong to his family, but we are far less faithful and loving than He and His Father are.

Hence the assurance Jesus gives us in the words quoted above is that, Love will always bear fruit. At times it may appear to us that to do good to certain people is a waste of time; people are often ungrateful, and on occasion those to whom we have done good turn against us.

*At times we get very discouraged in our loving certain persons. It is especially true when the other person is not responding to the much good or acts of love done to him. I know of a lady who goes on taking care of her negligent, lazy and drunk husband now for many years. I also have heard calls that such women should leave those "abusive" relationships and learn to manage on their own!*

We should never get discouraged. We shall never know the where, the when and the how the love we bestow on people will yield fruit. But yield it will; love is never lost. It is God's will that our life should yield fruit; it will yield fruit through love.

*Jesus said:* "I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete" (Jn. 15: 11)

- Love brings joy and Christian love is the way to share in Jesus' own joy: as much of it as we are capable of sharing. Christian joy comes from supernatural reasons. For instance,

- Joy at the thought of belonging to God's very family.
- Joy at the thought of having God not just by our side but within us at all times.
- Joy at the thought that whatever God possesses is at our disposal just for the asking: "My Father will give you anything you ask in my name" (Jn. 15: 16)
- Joy at the thought that there is a still greater and more complete happiness waiting for us in heaven.

Such is the God in whom we trust. No father, no mother ever loved his or her children as God loves us. He is all love; his only occupation is to love. It is worth loving people the way he does.

*I must hasten to add that God loves not only people but whatever he created:*

- We should not forget this aspect of God's love. He goes on bestowing it on everything that he created. The book of Genesis concludes the narration of the various steps in God's creation with the words: "God saw that it was good." In other words, God was delighted with whatever he created; he loved it.

- God loves the sun, the stars, the sky ...
- God loves the grass, the trees, the flowers, the rice that grows in our fields ...
- God loves the water, the rain, the rivers, the lakes, the vast sea ...
- God loves the fish that swim, the animals that roam in the forest, the birds that fly so beautifully ...

That's why Jesus loved Palestine, his country, Nazareth, his village, *his poor yet neat home, the very tools he used for his work! He loved the majestic Lebanon mountains to the North, the undulated landscape of Galilee, the lake of Genesareth and the boats crossing it. .. !*

If God loves all these things, that means that he wants us to love them too, or rather, that we discover in them his love for us; they are his gifts to us and we should be grateful for them.

Dear brothers and sisters, Love is the source of all genuine joys in life; it will be the same in heaven. I should not be stingy with my love; my own joy will increase in the measure in which I spread it around me.

*Let us pray: Father in heaven, we praise you for the love you continuously bestow on us the members of your Christian family; help us to faithfully observe the command your Son Jesus gave us of loving one another. May we never be*

*discouraged and give up this one task of loving you and loving one another. We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen*