

Sunday Homily

6th SUNDAY OF EASTER

17 MAY 2020

YEAR A

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

John 14:15

Illustration

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.

Gospel Teaching

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.

Application

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..