

Sixth Sunday of Easter

I have been thinking a lot about my family this week as we were preparing to celebrate Mother's Day. On Monday last I went to the West Terrace cemetery with the hope of finding the grave of my grandparents, my father's parents. I had found it on the Cemetery website but had never been there. Not only did I find the grave, but to my surprise the headstone was still there lying upon it. It read, "In loving memory of Thomas Edward beloved husband of Lillian Morris, who died at N. A. March 1st 1903, aged 35. Sweetly resting. Also the wife of above." My father was only four years old when his father died and within ten months his mother Lillian, who was 31 at that time, had also died.

We can easily take mothers and grandmothers for granted. I sometimes try to imagine what it must have been like for my father to have lost his mother when he was so young. He didn't talk about those things. My own mother died when I was a teenager, but I look back with a very grateful heart for the depth of the love that she had for me and for every member of my family. Now I remember with joy all that she taught us about loving.

In today's gospel Jesus draws us into a conversation that helps us to appreciate how much his life teaches us about loving. Jesus begins by going even deeper into that image of the vine and branches that we heard last week.

What unites us to Jesus the vine, is the love that he has for us. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love." The love that God the Father has for his Son Jesus flows through into us. It is this love that gives us life. It is this love that allows us to produce fruit. We are invited to abide in this love.

We could be moved to ask the Lord how we remain in his love. His answer may surprise us. "Keep my commandments just as I have kept my Father's commandments." Many of us turn off when we hear the word "commandment". We resist being told by someone else what we must do. One commentator described the commandments of God as being his gifts to us to indicate the way that love can be expressed. Obedience is a way of drawing closer to God by imitation.

Maybe on this Mother's Day weekend we should ask the mothers in our midst how often they have freely chosen to do what others have asked of them. Parents don't think that they are keeping the commandments when they love their children. They don't think that this is something imposed upon from outside. My mother would never have thought that she was commanded to love me. Loving, no matter how hard it is, no matter what it costs us, is always something that we choose to do. The way that we are called to love others is not always the way that we would want it to be. But the love

that moves us to act is always a free gift for the one we love.

Jesus invites us to love others in the way that he loves us. When we ask him how much he is ready to love us then he gently invites us to look at the cross. We hear him say to us. “I have laid down my life for you. There is no greater love than when someone lays down their life for their friend. You are my friends.” Jesus speaks here of a new relationship with us. We are not in a servant master relationship with Jesus. We are not called to submit to him. We are called to imitate him. If we are servants, we are servants with Jesus.

“I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father.” Jesus could go on to say, “I have revealed my Father’s love for you. I have spoken to you of the hopes God has for you and for the whole world. I have revealed his face to you just as you will reveal my face to others. I will continue to show you how to be more and more like me and give your life to others and in this to find happiness.”

The letter from John that we read today is a beautiful commentary upon John’s Gospel. “My dear people, let us love one another since love comes from God. God’s love for us was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son, so that we could have life through him; this

is the love I mean: not our love for God but God’s love for us.”

John and Jesus make it clear that God is always the first one to act. We can do nothing to deserve being loved by God. God’s love for us is pure gift. It is like the love that a mother or father has for their newborn baby. Jesus tells us today, “You did not choose me, no I chose you.” But once we have been chosen by God, once we have been loved into existence by him, then we can only be true to ourselves by being like God. The love that we have been given is love to be shared. “I chose you and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.” The fruit of God’s love for us is seen in the works of love that we do for one another.

Mother’s Day is a great day for us to remember all that we have learnt about love from our mothers. It is a great day to give thanks for what we have learnt about God from our mothers. It is a day when we can remember with thanks that Jesus’ command to love others as he has loved us has been lived out for us in so many practical and ordinary ways by the person that we honour as our mother.