

Sixth Sunday of Easter

During the Easter season we read a lot from the Acts of the Apostles. Today we hear the story of the people of a Samaritan town coming to faith in Jesus and then later receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. It reminds us of the way in which most of us were initiated into the life of the Church. We were baptised as infants and then later received the Sacrament of Confirmation. We were given the gift of faith as infants, but only came to know what to do with it when the bishop laid hands on us and anointed us, sending us out to live in union with Jesus, commissioning us to let the fuller gifts of the Spirit influence everything that we did.

I was thinking about those two stages of becoming Christian being reflected in what we are doing now. Some people could be just watching this Mass as they watch anything else on a screen. Other are choosing to pray this Mass with me, crossing the barriers that are there when we passively watch or listen to something on a screen. They are choosing to engage with the one who is present on the other side of the camera. And the one who we want to engage with is not me or the person who reads, but the one who is present in the word that is proclaimed and the one who becomes present in the bread and the wine of the Eucharist. That same Jesus is already with us wherever we are now. He

wants to be even more present to us by the way that we attend to him.

Today Jesus talks to us about how he is present to us. We cannot see God, but we can see the signs of what he is doing. Jesus tells us, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." Whenever I choose to do what I believe the Lord calls me to do then I am making room for the loving presence of Jesus. I am allowing the Spirit of Jesus to be alive and active within me.

On the eve of his departure from his disciples, Jesus promised that he would ask the Father to send them another Advocate. This advocate would act for them, accompany them, and continue to make God known to them, just as Jesus had acted for them, walked with them and made God known to them. This Advocate would be with them forever. He would reveal to them the truth of God's love for them. This Advocate would make present within them the very life and love of God.

But not everyone will be open to this Spirit of truth. Just as not everyone was open to receiving Jesus. "The Father will give you that Spirit of truth, whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows him, but you know him because he is with you, he is in you."

For the people who failed to recognise who Jesus was, his death would have been his final departure from them. But for those who knew Jesus and loved him, his death was indeed a moment of departure, but it was also the moment when Jesus would begin to be with them in a new and powerful way. “In a short time, the world will no longer see me; but you will see me, because I live, and you will live. On that day you will understand that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.” Jesus is talking here about that wonderful intimacy that he has with his Father, an intimacy that he is now going to share with us. It is almost too hard to put words around it, but it is that love that the Father has for the Son and the Son has for his Father that is being shared with us. We are drawn into the communion of love that is God.

The signs of our union with God will be shown by who we are and what we do. That inner hidden life of God will be expressed in the good things that we do in love. The beauty of the life of love within us will flower in the love that we have for God and the love we have for one another. “Anybody who receives my commandments and keeps them will be one who loves me; and anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and show myself to him.”

We hold onto that when we are ridiculed and criticised for putting others first. Peter tells us today to always have our answer ready for people who ask us the reason for our hope. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves if we live in such a way that others will notice the hope that we have. Do we live in such a way that the hiddenness of God with break through in the good things that we do for others? Even when the road is hard and the world around us seems to be falling to pieces, we can remain people of hope, because we are looking ahead to the one who calls us to follow him. He underwent suffering and death for our sake. Peter goes on to say, “Why, Christ himself, innocent though he was, had died once for sins, died for the guilty, to lead us to God. In the body he was put to death, in the spirit he was raised to life.”

Our reading from the Acts of the Apostles helps us to marvel at the way that the early church communities grew despite the persecutions that they suffered. May we continue to grow as people of faith, aware of how close Jesus is to us and open to the gifts of the Spirit that empower us to make him present to others.