

Homily for May 14, 2023

6th Sunday Easter

Are you Jesus?

In today's Gospel Jesus twice states "that if we love him we will keep his commandments". I want to share with you a story that illustrates this vividly. A few years ago a group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago. They had assured their wives that they would be home in plenty of time for Friday night's dinner. In their rush through the airport, one of these salesmen inadvertently kicked over a table which held a display of apples. Apples flew everywhere. Without stopping or looking back, they all managed to reach the plane, just in time. All but one. He told the others to go on without him and went back to where the apples were all over the floor. He was glad he did.

The 16-year-old girl, the apple seller, was totally blind! She was softly crying, tears running down her cheeks, as she groped for her spilled produce, the crowd swirling about her, rushing to their flights. The salesman knelt on the floor with her, gathered up the apples, put them back on the table and helped reorganize her display. He set aside the bruised and battered apples in a separate basket. When he had finished, he pulled out his wallet and said to the girl, "Here, please take this \$40 for the damage we did. Are you okay?" She nodded through her tears. He continued, "I hope we didn't spoil your day too badly." As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, "Hey, mister...." He paused and turned to look back. She continued, "Are you Jesus?" He couldn't get that question out of his head for days. It was such a simple, small-scale event, but it made him see clearly what following Christ was really all about. "Love one another as I have loved you." To be a Christian is to be another Christ.

Are you Jesus? Indeed it was the very Spirit of Jesus that was in this man – that allowed him to realize that more important than his flight was not to take flight from this teenager whose life had been upturned that day. This man who was the face and presence of Jesus helped to turn her life around right.

The story I have shared is an expression of what it means to be a disciple. Jesus said he would send to the disciples the Spirit of Truth, the Advocate. What was this man's response? In an instant he assessed the situation knowing the truth of what he had to do - to help her - to be an advocate as he came alongside her.

This is at the heart of how we are to live as followers of Jesus and the Lord teaches that it is very different from the way of the world, who does not receive the Spirit. Think of O'Hare Airport. No one else took notice of what happened at the apple cart. To receive the Spirit is an invitation to look up to God and out on the world with tender care. When we cultivate this kind of attitude increasingly people will see Jesus in us and through us. And not only that, when we learn to live this way, as we express genuine care and love to others we in turn will know more fully the Father's love and Jesus will reveal himself to us so that we will see Jesus in others, as others see Jesus in us.

To look up to God and look out on the world with tenderness is the theme also expressed in the reading from 1st Peter. Here St Peter invites us to “in our hearts sanctify Christ as Lord”. This means that our hearts are to be like a Tabernacle, the place where we make room for his abiding love and know that Jesus dwells within us. As we look up to him we can then look out on the world not with a defensive need to protect ourselves from those who do not know Jesus and his love. Rather we are to treat others with a gentleness and reverence even if they do not reciprocate this. Why is this? When we follow St Peter’s counsel we make room for Jesus in the place of our invisible heart so that in turn we will show forth his love in how we speak about him to others in the visible world. When we are living with this kind of perspective, St Peter says we can have a clear conscience even when we suffering for doing God’s will. For you see, out of this suffering opportunities can be made available for to be brought to God. Peter shows how this applies in the life of Jesus:

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous in order to bring you to God.

When we live intentionally upward toward God and outward toward the world people will encounter authentic love. Such authentic love is imparted to us by the Holy Spirit, who in our first reading finds expression in the Samaritan city. Now remember Samaria was for the Jewish people a land they would not visit because of the disdain Samaritans had for Jews and Jews for Samaritans. However Jesus at his Ascension said the disciples were to witness to his love even in Samaria! And so Phillip does this. He is willing to inconvenience himself, like the salesman in our opening story, and we are told that signs and wonders accompany the proclamation of Jesus and his love. The result of this encounter is first joy in the city and subsequently those who had been baptize in the name of Jesus are then confirmed by Peter and John who come and lay hands on them.

Here is what I want us to see today. When we live authentically and caringly in how we treat others, speak to others and minister to them, we will be communities and people characterized by Joy. Pope St Paul VI said of joy:

“the Gospel will not go forward with boring, bitter evangelizers”. “It will only go forward with joyful evangelizers, full of life”

This life is captured vividly in this verse from today’s psalm:

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth, sing the glory of his name and give to him glorious praise. Say to God “How awesome are your deeds”

Jesus gives to us an understanding of this joy when he says in today’s Gospel:

The one who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me; and the one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.

To keep Jesus’ commandments is to look up and out, as did the man in Chicago, and Phillip in Samaria. As we cultivate this way of living we will know that we our loved by the Father and by

Jesus. And he will reveal himself to us and we pray through us be revealed to others – so that when people look at us they may even say: “Hey mister, are you Jesus?”