

Sixth Sunday of Easter



A sad story. Some years ago, I heard about two women who brought to the Sisters of Mother Teresa an old woman they found in the streets, abandoned, needing food and shelter—so they claimed. After the two women left, the old woman cried and told the sisters that she was not someone they found in the streets. She was their mother, she was getting to be a burden, so they left her there.

Another sad story. One time an old woman told me: “Father, better for me to die now.” When I asked her why, in between her sobs, she said: What’s the use of living? My children hardly visit me. Whenever they call me, they shout at me and get angry at me. When I ask for something, they bring up their own problems and needs. What pains me most is that they go on quarreling, and we have no peace in the family.” A sad story. Is it also your story in your family? Its all about “**Love**”.

Loving an Absent Jesus

In Africa young girls who consecrate themselves to God as nuns dress up as brides for a wedding and sing love songs to Jesus. A few years after such a religious ceremony, a young nun who had been having a rough time in her mission assignment comes back to the convent and asks the Mother Superior: “Mother, is it really true that we are spouses of Christ.” “Yes, it is true, my daughter,” replies the Mother Superior, “Why do you ask?” “Well,” stammered the young nun, “Since I was professed five years ago, I haven’t actually felt anything!”

Our poor nun may not have felt anything, yet she remains on the right track in understanding the relationship between Jesus and his devotees in terms of an intimate love relationship. When Jesus speaks in today’s gospel of “**those who love me**” he is referring to his followers. For Jesus “those who love me” is another way of saying “my disciples” or “those who believe in me” or simply “Christians.” The relationship between the Christian and Christ is essentially a love relationship. That is why Jesus said in John 15:15 “**I do not call you servants any longer ... I call you friends.**” Yet many of us feel more comfortable serving Jesus as boss rather than relating to him as a friend. There is a limit to what a boss can demand from you. There is no such limit when it comes to friendship and intimacy. One thing we know about love is that lovers want to be with each other. But Jesus is not physically present. We cannot physically see him or touch him. This is the dilemma we see in the problem of the young nun. How can you love an absent Jesus? This is what today’s gospel is all about. In the gospel Jesus prepares his disciples, those who love him, for his departure from this world and shows them how they can keep love and intimacy alive even in his physical absence.

Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them (John 14:23).

If you love Jesus, (1) Keep his word. Follow his teachings. (2) This will activate God's special love for you, and (3) Jesus and his Father will come and live permanently with you. In this way the vacuum left by the physical absence of Jesus will be filled spiritually by the divine presence which is as real or even more real than the physical presence. Our part in this whole process is to focus on keeping the word of Christ.

But how do we be sure we know the implication and meaning of the word of Christ in the ever changing and ever more complex realities of modern life? How can we be sure what Jesus would do and how he would act in the present concrete situations of our daily lives? Again, Jesus foresaw this difficulty and provided for it. **"The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you"** (John 14:26).

If that is so, what do we make of the situation in the world today where a thousand Christians all "filled with the Holy Spirit" come up with a thousand different answers to the same question? Does the Holy Spirit contradict Himself? Here it is important to note that the "you" to whom these promises are made is plural, meaning, primarily, the community of believers, the church. Of course, the Holy Spirit is with us individually, but the Holy Spirit is given primarily to the church and, through the church, to us as individuals when we become members of the church.

This is what we see in the 1st reading where disagreements among Christians are resolved through dialogue and community discernment and not through each one consulting the Holy Spirit privately. In the end they come out with a resolution which begins **"it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us."** (Acts 15:28). The word of Christ continues to live and resound in the word of the Holy Spirit speaking through the church. The days between the Ascension of Christ and Pentecost are special days of prayer for all Christians as they were for the first disciples of Jesus. This year let us pray especially for the gift of church unity, so that together we all can discern what the Spirit is saying to the church in the modern world and so bear united witness to the life-giving word of Christ.

Amen