

Homily notes from Canon Philip Dyson
Sunday 9th May 2021 - 6th Sunday of Easter

Readings (Year B): 1st: Acts 10:25-26. 34-35. 44-48. Psalm 97. 2nd:
1 John 4:7-10. Gospel: John 15:9-17.

Nobody in the world in recent years was better known than Saint Mother Teresa for working with the poor, the sick, the hungry, the outcast, the rejected, and the unloved. She herself said “the poor do not need our condescending attitude or our pity. They only need our love and our tenderness.”

When she visited the affluent western world she was appalled by the other type of hunger she experienced, the poverty / hunger of the spirit. This famine of loveless lives sees increasing numbers of suicides: and the movement for assisted death/suicide grows daily: The sheer number of abortions, over 200,000 this past year in UK.

We hear daily how many have died through Covid, but not how many unborn we kill year on year. Life –escaping addictions: the drugs we see around us; the violence and alienation even within the home. The peaceful protests that turn to violence. The killing, often of the young by the young.

We know not, nor shall we for a long time, know the full outcome of the Covid pandemic affecting the whole world; so many areas of life, especially for children and young people.

St Teresa did also say “If faith is scarce, it is because there is too much selfishness in the world, too much egoism. Faith in order to be authentic, has to be generous and giving. Love and faith go hand in hand.”

Today’s gospel continues the lessons of the vine and the branches. What is in the main trunk of the tree passes out into the branches and into the outermost little twigs. Jesus is thus explaining that the life which is in him is passing out into the souls of the true disciples. What is most special about Jesus is his relationship with the Father. He is the beloved Son. The Father’s great love for the Son is now being passed out into the branches. ‘As the Father has loved me, so I

have loved you.’ The whole secret of Christian life is ‘to remain in my love.’ The love of God, as shown to us in Jesus Christ, is the whole basis of our philosophy of life; it is the foundation of all our hopes; it is the home we come back to, where we know we are understood and accepted.

For the Christian, love isn’t an option or a fanciful idea that we take or leave: it is a command. Jesus says so very clearly: “This is my commandment: Love one another.”

And if this weren’t hard enough, the pinnacle of love, its very height and essence, isn’t half-heartedly tolerating people, putting up with them; with no qualification, conditions or limitations; without judgement, measurements or expectations of a return; even the undeserving, the mean spirited, the ungrateful and the unreasonable. Such love can be overwhelmingly demanding: so challenging, so utterly beyond us, so difficult and frankly impossible that if we truly understood the call to love, we would throw our hands up in despair, sigh deeply and say, ‘This is impossible.’

However, if we are open to the Holy Spirit we hear him saying to us ‘What is impossible for you, is possible with God.’ The key to understanding love, the self- sacrificing *agape* love of the gospel, being prepared to love your enemy who just happens to be your neighbour, is that we can’t love like this without God’s grace and power.

The words of Jesus we hear today are so full of love, affirmation and encouragement that we should keep reading them; memorising them and proclaiming them.

The model of love for all true discipleship is extreme, limitless: for it is Jesus himself who lays down his life for his friends, as does the good shepherd. Yet it is precisely for love like this that Jesus has chosen them and us. We will bring forth enduring fruit.

As one commentator says: love is not so much a command as a prescription for life for us **who are his friends**.

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