6th Sunday of Easter (Year B)

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

In these final days of Eastertide we once again find ourselves sitting with Jesus at the Last Supper. In this Gospel passage there is no great and complicated conversation going on just words that are perfectly simple in a style that spells out an intended meaning. The theme moves in continuous circles, or a better description is it flows in spirals. And as we read we are offered a divinely revealed wisdom. Here is a view for us of the theology of the Holy Trinity, and the meaning and purpose of all human life; it is the height of the Christian mystery. We may never come to the end of reading these words of Jesus; as we meditate on them, as we wonder at them and rejoice in them… They are life for us and in these words: As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love we have a revelation that our very life has true worth. I don't know about you but I would love to pass this gift of love on but I cannot help but wonder if the secular world would have any understanding of just how great the Fathers love is for us.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

Because the end of this part of His ministry is near Jesus opens up to his intimate friends, and He speaks about love. The word is said 31 times in this dialogue. But the love he speaks of is not trivial or sentimental… on the contrary, it's too big for us. In principle this love is utterly beyond our comprehension, and yet it is precisely what we are called to enter into and live by. Jesus is talking about that love by which the eternal Father loves the Jesus, the eternal Son. God loves the Son so much that he gives absolutely everything of himself. But this love entered into another mode when the eternal Son became human on that first Christmas morning.

Jesus speaks of his Father's love for him, not just because of his identity as the Son, but also because as a human he perfectly lives in his Father's love, and perfectly fulfils his commandments. That is, Jesus lives permanently in the presence of his Father, loving and worshipping him with nothing coming between or interrupting their loving communion. How many times are we told that Jesus went off by himself to pray… and who was he praying to… to the Father… He obediently and perfectly fulfils his mission, which is to bring us into that circle of a Trinitarian love. Jesus pours out his love on us not only divinely but also humanly; so much so that he lays down his life and pours out his blood in order that we might be able to have a relationship God. To become his children.

The Holy Spirit is not explicitly mentioned in the words of today's Gospel, but it can be helpful if we notice the Holy Spirits presence. The Holy Spirit is in Person that essence of love which the Father eternally pours out to the Son, and which the Son eternally pours back to the Father. This man called Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, and with that same Spirit he also loves us. And the ultimate gift of this love is the gift of the Holy Spirit in us.

According to St. John, Jesus handed over the Spirit at the moment of his death. Then on Easter Day he breathed that same Spirit in power upon his Apostles. Therefore it is by the Holy Spirit that this love of Jesus lives within us. It is also by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to live in that love.

So how do we remain in Jesus' love as it's both a gift but also a command. The gift of the Holy Spirit puts love into our hearts where there was none before. Yet also: the grace of the Holy Spirit enables us, if we wish, to return that love with our own love: personally, freely and actively. I would suggest that to do this is part of our Christian way and I think we carry out this interweaving interaction by living out our lives in faith.

There is a harder side to this love… as it can be an effort at times to put aside all those proud and foolhardy thoughts and tendencies that crop up from time to time. After all we are only human…

But in a positive light we can for ourselves try to develop in our understanding of this relationship with God by prayer and study among other things and to seek a humility which in turn brings about a movement of the heart because the fruit of love is simply more love.

We bear this fruit for God when we respond to his love by loving Him and one another; when by living in that love we actually live as children of God.

However for some folk all this talk of love can appear as nebulas as white fluffy clouds or as tame as a skipping spring lamb but for others this love of and in Jesus can seem a serious thing as it demands everything, and will cost everything. Sometimes people are overjoyed and embrace it fully… but then somehow they lose sight of it; they become lost and just like the sowed seeds… are the seed that will fall away. This I find very sad because the more we engage with our Father through Jesus in the power of the Spirit the more we will be deepened, and widened, and strengthened, until finally our relationship with the Holy Trinity flows easily, spontaneously, naturally, and with all the joy there is to be had in the whole world…

If we go back to the upper room and look at the Last Supper, along with this new commandment of love, Jesus also gave us this Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Here at the table we remember afresh his sacrificial death, which is the perfect expression of this love and when we come to the Lords table, we will again be reminded of that love that Jesus has for us but also of the grace we need to be able to pass that on to others. And so here and now and by the power of the Holy Spirit I feel that we are to unite with Jesus and with one another into one Body: and this is for our own infinite good, but more importantly for God's eternal glory. Amen

Rev Pete Bone

9th May 2021