

## **SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER: MAY 26, 2019**

In the gospel today Jesus says to his disciples: "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.... 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."

The Christ promises to be with us. In fact, the meaning of Easter is that we are in Christ and Christ is in us. We are never separated from the Christ, the universal, cosmic, risen Christ who fills all creation. And, in Christ, we are immersed in the life of the Triune God, Father, Word and Spirit.

For five weeks now we have been celebrating Easter. It is the heart of our faith. Easter really tells us who we are, the meaning of our lives, how we are to find out what our lives are really all about. But, I wonder, have we become more aware of this presence of God, of Christ in our lives during this Easter time? Or do we sometimes think God is totally absent?

Some years ago I remember reading various stories written by the Indian Jesuit, Tony DeMello. They are wisdom stories that make us think, make us be more aware of that which we take for granted or even tend to ignore. In one story, of which I really cannot recall the details, DeMello talks about some fish in the sea. One young fish says to one of his elder fish, I need to leave home and explore the world. I have heard that there is a large ocean out there and I want to find it.

I think that this attitude is one which many have about our Christ-consciousness. We are swimming in the life of Christ but keep on looking for it elsewhere. We are not aware of how much we are embraced by Christ, by love.

Sometimes we recognize Christ's presence when we remember something or someone that happened in our life. We know that we were embraced by some transcendent reality that made us experience something unexpected or unexplained. Only in retrospect do we know that we were in the sea of Christ.

There is more to it than this, however. Christ is with us in moments of love, of joy, of beauty, of the fullness of life. We can miss these moments if we are too turned into only ourselves. But the risen Christ still bears the marks of his crucifixion in his body. We also find the Christ in our own wounds, as well as in the wounds of others and the world. God was with Jesus on the cross even though Jesus felt abandoned at the time.

Jesus was the human face of God. What was this face? It was a face of love and compassion. It was a face of unconditional acceptance and respect for all people. It was a total, self-emptying

love that gives and forgives. The Holy Spirit is given to us to remind us of all this and move us to be the same face of God in the world.

We are truly in Christ when we have the same love and compassion he showed us. I think this is the key to being our best selves. We are to show unconditional compassion to all those in need – the pregnant mother and her offspring, the displaced family, the immigrant on the border, the prisoner on death row, the handicapped and mentally challenged person. And not only people. We are called to have compassion for our earth and all creation. Respect for all life, for humans, for animals, for the biodiversity of all creation. As long as we exclude any of these creatures of God, we exclude the presence of Christ. Did not Jesus say, “What you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did unto me?” And Christ appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, and said to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

Yes, the risen Christ is always present to us but we can ignore him, exclude him, prefer to rely on our own ability than be inserted into life itself.

There is still another possibility for us in seeking the presence of Christ and finding his absence. It happens when we seek not Christ nor the love of the Triune God who is Love itself, but we rather look for God’s blessings, his miracles, his healings, his security and care. The shocking reality as we come to embrace the risen Christ in our lives is that this presence will burn away any impure attachments that get in the way of love. The loss may even include the satisfaction we get from prayer, of feeling close and intimate with the Christ. To love means to let go of everything but the beloved. Many Saints have told us of this pain of no longer feeling the presence of Christ when they were, in fact, coming closer to God, to life, to being the human being they are called to be.

Saint Augustine has always spoken to me in his words, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart are restless until they rest in Thee.” We are made for love, for deep, infinite, unlimited love. We can settle for less or we can be dedicated followers of Christ.

The gospel today tells us that Jesus promised, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You have heard me tell you, ‘I am going away and I will come back to you’... And now I tell you this before it happens so that when it happens you may believe.”

Christ is absent but Christ is present. This is the heart of Easter.

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