



Sixth Sunday of Easter (Year C)

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 22 May, 2022
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

When we gathered together six weeks ago to celebrate Easter we were invited to identify ourselves with the disciples as they went through the terrible experience of the suffering and death of Jesus. That cruel and shocking death was not only, as everyone thought, the end of Jesus. It was also, quite possibly, the end of the faith, the trust and the hope which the disciples had placed in Jesus during his lifetime. He had promised them so much and, of course, at the heart of that promise was his revelation of the mystery of God's incredible love, fidelity and compassion for his people. The disciples, who had begun to believe in that love and compassion because they had seen it at work in the life of Jesus, now saw it all destroyed as Jesus was tortured and brutally executed. On the day after the first Good Friday the disciples must have believed that they had lost Jesus forever.

It was into this dark and deadly place that the Lord Jesus burst forth from the tomb and burst into their lives once again. They thought they had lost him forever and now they had him back again, the one upon whom they now could build their lives with confidence.

The two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus described how their hearts had burned with joy within them as they encountered him. It must have been the same for all those to whom Jesus showed himself after the resurrection. One of them was Mary Magdalene who was the first to see the risen Lord. The Gospel tells us that when she recognised him, she fell at his feet and tried to hold on to him. She had lost him once, she did not want to lose him again.

It was then that Jesus said to her, *"Mary, do not cling to me because I have not yet ascended to my Father in heaven."*

In these words, there was a hint of something that Mary and all the disciples had to come to terms with. After his resurrection Jesus would not, and indeed could, not continue to be with those he loved in the way he had been before his death. He had now risen to a new and eternal life, he had accomplished the task his Father had given him, and now he would return to his Father in heaven. Jesus had already spoken of this with his disciples, as this morning's gospel reminds us, during his last supper with them before his death.



The Last Supper was, and remains, the Lord's great feast of love. Jesus speaks of the love he has for his Father and which his Father has for him; he speaks of the love he has for his disciples and their love for him; and he asks his disciples to love each other as he has loved them.

All of us who have ever loved will know how important it is that we can be with those we love. When the state borders were finally opened, and people from the eastern states were able to come to Perth and visit family they had not seen for over two years, the scenes of joy at the airport, which so many of us would have either experienced ourselves or seen on television, make the importance of being present to each other especially clear. This is why Jesus wanted to reassure his disciples that he would always remain with them. He spoke about his return to his Father but promised that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to remind them of everything that Jesus had said and done while with them. And then he links this gift of the Holy Spirit to the gift of love. *"If you love me,"* he says to his disciples, *"then my Father will love you and we will come to be with you and live with you"*.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit among us who draws us into the presence of Jesus. He has not left us alone. He promised that he would not leave us orphans. He promised that he would be with us to the end of time. And it is through his Holy Spirit that he fulfils this promise.

This all happens in so many ways. Jesus is present to us in the depths of our hearts. He is present to us in those we love. He is present to us in those who call out to us in need and draw the best out of us as we respond to them. And, of course, he is present with us in our life in the Church. This is especially true in the sacrament we are celebrating now, the sacrament of the Eucharist. We know that when we approach the altar to receive Holy Communion, we are approaching the Lord himself. We take and we eat, believing the Lord when he says to us, *This is my body*. And we return to our place united with him in love and gratitude so that we can then bring him to all those we encounter in the days ahead.

It was love that led Jesus to the cross: love for his heavenly Father and love for us his beloved people. It was love that led him to send his Holy Spirit so that through the Spirit he might always remain with us. It was love that led him to transform the Passover feast of his Jewish tradition into the Eucharistic feast which we celebrate today.

Love cries out to be received and returned. Today, as every day, the Lord cries out to us: *I do not call you servants but friends. Love me and let me love you. Let me unite you to myself so that in me you can come to the Father*. God is calling us to love and as we respond to this call our lives will be enriched in ways that, until it happens, we can hardly imagine.