



**Sixth Sunday of Easter (Year A)
Sacramentum Conference 2020**

Homily

**By the Most Rev Bishop Don Sproxton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

Pastoral Centre Chapel
17 May, 2020

This Conference has been very different, as almost every other meeting or conference has been in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet I hope that it has been a rewarding experience for everyone. I would not like to think this method of meeting together, though, is to be the “New Normal”!

Being together face-to-face, is the best way for human interaction. Adults learn so well by listening then sharing what they have heard; by praying together and reflecting on all that we receive from presenters and each other. The Holy Spirit uses all of this for our growing in faith and understanding of the Gospel.

The Archbishop and I have just completed eight days of meeting with our brother bishops by videoconference. The Australian bishops meet twice a year at Mary McKillop Place in North Sydney or in Melbourne. This year, our conference has had to be this way, without the usual amount of fraternal interaction and companionship.

Sacramentum, offers our young adults the opportunity to explore further who Jesus Christ is and what is the Gospel he has brought to our world, and has been structured around the Five Loves of St John Paul II. You have had the chance to reflect on the great love that John Paul had for young people, human love, the Blessed Sacrament, the Virgin Mary and the Cross.

When we read about him, we find these five loves weaving their way through his life: as he grew to adulthood in Poland; when he was discerning his vocation to the priesthood through the horrific experiences of war; his constant seeking for the sources of strength and courage that he required to be a man of faith and an encouragement for others; his discovery that Mary, the Mother of God, was a true mother to him in whom he learned to trust; and the place of the Cross in his life and how it could become something glorious, the way to grow in faith and receive eternal life.

The five loves of John Paul flowed from the love he came to discover from God. God loved him first, showed him what love is. John Paul lived as best he could in that love.



I, too, seek each day the source of spiritual strength and courage for my ministry as a bishop. I have found these graces in the prayer where I have experienced a real communion with Jesus, who walks as he has promised with us, each day, each hour and each moment of the day. Go out into the deep.

To be prepared to go into the deep without being paralysed by fear has only been possible because I have known the presence of Jesus by my side. He is there because of his love for me, despite my shortcomings. His gifts of grace have built on what is there by nature.

This, I believe, was John the Evangelist's experience too.

John was the apostle who lived a very long life. He spoke more and more about the love of God, the older he got. Someone asked him why he did not speak of other things to his community. He responded that this was what he heard in all that Jesus spoke and did. He meant that everything he heard and saw in the life and teaching of Jesus was about the love of God for us.

So the Gospel of today's Mass is typical of John. It centres on the teaching of Jesus: Love one another as I have loved you. But there is a caution. Do not love others just to win the love of God. This would be to have not known God at all. John insists that we can only love because God has loved us first. It is when we come to understand the attitude of God to each and every one of us that we can respond by genuinely keeping the commandments, especially the great commandment of love. God has loved us first. This is the Good News. It was the message of the Prophets. And it, the love of God, was fulfilled in everything that Jesus did as our Saviour. No one was or is excluded.

A favourite story of the Catholic Church is the one about the woman who met Jesus at a village well in Samaria. St John included it in his gospel, in Chapter Four. Jesus waited at the well for her in the middle of the day, an unusual time for a woman to go for the day's household water. Water was collected early in the morning. This woman waited until everyone had gone, for she was a sinner, a woman of shame and shunned by everyone.

Jesus waited for her because the love of God precedes us. She would meet the love that would transform her and accompany her. Jesus was love for her, love that is being there for others and offers divine life. That experience of knowing that God loved her first brought her reconciliation-personal, with her community and God. She became a messenger of Good News to her community.

This is one of our favourite stories for we believe that love conquers division, restores what we have lost over our lifetimes, and frees us from individualism and self-absorption. We are freed so that we can be there for others, not judging or condemning, separating and dividing people into those who are in and those who are out.



Remember that one of the fruits of the death and resurrection of Jesus was the reconciliation of those Jews and Samaritans when they became Christians, brothers and sisters in the faith. St John heard many things from Jesus but for him they were all aspects of God's love. And if he were living with us today, he would, I guess, be saying the same: love with the love of Jesus, give of ourselves for others, and share our lives with others as fully as possible.