

## Homily 5th Sunday in Easter - Year C (19.5.19)

You know, if you ask a priest what's the worst thing they could preach on, I think it's 'love'. It's impossible to preach on love. It's all over the place. And I find this gospel of 'love one another as I have loved you' difficult. Did you not notice that Jesus says I gave you a new commandment? How can you command people to love? I command you to love me. It doesn't work, does it? Commandment - I think it's a misunderstanding because, of course, Jesus is talking in the sense of the Mosaic Moral Law, the best of the principles which guided people's decisions like the 10 Commandments. So not like law as we know it in a modern state. So he's almost saying,

**"I give you a new principle by which to work from in all your actions. Love one another ; As I have loved you, so you should love one another."**

And they always say, don't they, that you never really know a person until you live with them. Hands up all those spouses who found out what their partners were really like after you got married?

[laughter]

Yeah, very different, isn't it? And I think this is what Jesus is talking about. He's talking about this little community he'd formed as a basis, a template for the church. You see, he had lived with them for three years, going around Israel preaching the good news. And the first thing, I mean, we tend to think this love has to be like Christ's sacrifice, but I think it's about living with people, as well as that. So you get Jesus who chose the 12, and other

disciples, and they were all different characters, weren't they? Some of them were zealots, some have been a tax collector, a collaborator, others had been fishermen and so on. And they were all very different in temperament. Some grumpy, no doubt, some jolly, some critical, and you never really see Jesus treat them badly. You might see him exhort them, tell them off if they were going offbeat, but he was very accepting of difference in character and wanted to shape and mould these extreme characters into something that would be an image of the kingdom of God.

And I think that's the first lesson about that love, because I think this is meant to apply to us in church. That we're all very different characters, some people are timid, some people are strong, and so on. Some people maybe speak as they find and others hold their own counsel. But we're told that this is our job lot. We are meant to mould and shape a witness in the world with what God gives us, including ourselves.

And then the second thing that hit me about this group is that it doesn't actually say it anywhere, does it, whether Jesus liked any of them, or even disliked some of them. You get hints of the disciple Jesus loved in John's gospel, and he was obviously very fond of the young John. And Peter seems to be somebody he really admires when he praises him in,

**"Upon this rock I will build my church."**

The only extreme version I can remember is where the rich young man comes to him and he wants to follow God with idealism and when he says,

**"Well, sell everything you've got and come follow me."**

He walked away sad. And the Gospel says ,

**"Jesus loved him."**

That's the only very strong emotion I've ever come across outside the disciples. He was deeply moved by a person. He was deeply moved by this person who was a young person wanting to follow God closely, and he felt sorry for him so much he felt this love in his inability to take it a step further. And I think that's very true of us, you know. That's our experience sometimes, but again, we're called to be church, whether we like some people or not. I'm sure there's somebody in church who doesn't like somebody else. And maybe even, God forbid, positively hates someone else.

[laughter]

But that's the reality, that God has thrown us together, and we can't help who we like, it's often chemistry. I don't mean if somebody's a maniac and always being violent, I'm on about everyday people. The point is we can't like everyone. But Jesus in effect says,

**"They'll know you're my disciples if they see the love you share regardless of liking."**

It's not about liking, it's about building the kingdom of God when we mix and live together, in terms of groups, societies, working for the parish, and we rub shoulders with people we wouldn't normally associate with. And Jesus says,

**"This is the cauldron of love.";** the ability to show selfless love.

And that's what ultimately Christ's sacrifice was. It wasn't about how we feel, it was loving regardless of feelings, because when we love, if you think about it we make a sacrifice.

Paul says those beautiful words, doesn't he? He says,

**"It's hard to imagine somebody dying for somebody else, but for a really good person, maybe somebody would be willing to die."**

And the only example I can see, except in cases of positive extraordinary heroism, where we'd offer a sacrificial love like Christ is when we would die to save a loved one, like a child in danger. The normal person in the street would be willing to die maybe for a loved one, a spouse, a child. But you know, it's good, I'm not knocking it. Don't misunderstand me, but there's always a reward in love returned, isn't there? It's a fact that when we love we get love in return. And Jesus, you know, he says those brilliant words,

**"When you have a meal, don't invite those who can repay you."**

He's not saying don't have a meal with those who you love, but he's underpinning this principle of a love that doesn't expect anything back because there's nothing in the other person that you want or need. And this is sacrifice, this is sacrificial love, so that when we gather as church, we eat the meal that he's prepared for us, and we don't expect any return from anybody else, where the gift from God is one way, but then we're expected to return his love, his sacrificial love, in the way we function with others in church.