

Homily for the 6th Sunday of Easter, May 17, 2020

Once again today we are with the disciples at the Last Supper. There is a sense of sadness in today's gospel reading. It is Jesus's farewell. "*Parting is such sweet sorrow!*" as Shakespeare's Juliet tells Romeo. Despite the sadness in the air, Jesus takes the time to tell his friends how they are going to live when he is no longer physically present with them. He gives them this command: "*if you love me keep my commandments.*"

Notice the word "**my**." This is not just keeping the Ten Commandments. It is much more than that. Jesus's command to his followers can be summed up in one basic commandment: "love one another as I have loved you." Remember, this is not a set of rules to obey or a commandment to follow. It is a call to live our lives like Jesus lived his life. What Jesus is asking for us to do is to pledge to love one another as he has loved us! Interestingly enough it is a pledge not to love God but rather to love one another. And why should we do this? Because Jesus identifies with us. Recall what Jesus told Saint Paul, when Paul was on the road to Damascus looking to persecute Christians: *Why are you persecuting me?* So, **Jesus identifies with us** and as Christians we are being called to become other Christs. Let me make it clear, we do not keep Jesus's commandment to love one another so that Jesus will love us. No, we keep his commandment because Jesus loves us. Our faith tells us that God's love for us is unconditional and unearned. It is similar to the love of parents, who simply love a child because it is their child. This type of love is never earned and cannot be lost. Again, God does not love us because we are good but loves us because God is good. Look at the example of Jesus -- He knew that the father loved him and because of that love Jesus was *obedient until death, death on the Cross*. So it is through our obedience that we show God that we love him.

I know it is not easy to live this committed Christian life, that is to live according to the teachings of Jesus as laid out for us in the Sermon of the Mount: *Love one's enemies, to turn the other cheek, to forgive as Jesus forgives*. Remember, If you love those who love you, what good is that? Even the pagans do that. Yes, Jesus knew that to live like he lives would not be easy. He knew that we would need special help to live this way. So he promises to send the Spirit. He called the **Spirit** an **Advocate**, literally a defense lawyer, i.e. someone who will be with us to help us and defend us.

During these days of confinement many people have lost their loved ones. They know that It is so much easier to say hello then to say goodbye. For, goodbye seems so final. It makes us think we will never see that person again or never had the same relationship with that person ever again. But, farewell should never mean forgotten rather it should simply mean there will be a different relationship with that person in the future. Perhaps, I can give you an analogy it is like saying "farewell" to your child when he or she goes off to college or gets married. The relationship is still there, very real but it is different.

Finally, Jesus's farewell comes with the promise: *"I will not leave you orphans, I will give you the Holy Spirit."* So during these dark days when life itself gets tough, turn to the Holy Spirit to guide you. Try to remember those gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord.

Let us end with a prayer: *"Lord, I can't survive without you. Give me the help you promise me, my Advocate."*