

Sixth Sunday of Easter (C)

May 25, 2014. *Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. (Jn. 14:23).*

Since Easter Sunday, the Scripture readings at both our Sunday and weekday Masses have been a specific invitation to enter more deeply into the Mystery of Christ. From earliest times the Church has used a specific term to describe the liturgical preaching or catechesis of the Easter Season. It is called *mystagogy*. Its aim is to initiate people into the Mystery of Christ; both the newly baptized and also those of us who renewed our baptismal vows on Easter Sunday. During this Easter time, there is a particular grace that enables us to proceed from the visible to the invisible; from the sign to the thing signified, from the *sacraments* to the *mysteries* (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1075); and the ultimate Mystery is God Himself.

In this manner, for example, we perceive in the Paschal Lamb a sign of the Lamb of God, Jesus who by His Death and Resurrection leads us to the Heavenly Jerusalem. In the Gospel of the Mass, our Lord makes a promise: *Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. (Jn. 14:23)*. It is a promise fulfilled through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of salvation then, is more than liberation from sin and death. Salvation is communion, a union with Jesus and the Father, but also a union with others who share the same life. This is the deeper mystery that God is calling us to share – not simply a solidarity of sorts with those around us who share our faith but a union with our Lord Jesus Christ and the Father in the Holy Spirit. The term that describes perfectly this mystery is mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*). Our Lord says, *Abide in me, and I in you (Jn. 15:4)*.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. (Jn. 14:23). Jesus dwells in us by virtue of His humanity. As St. Hilary explains, Jesus is in the Father by reason of his divine nature; we are in Him by virtue of His human birth and He is in us through the mystery of the sacraments (Cf. St. Hilary, *Treatise on the Trinity, Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. II, pp. 778-780). This unity or mutual indwelling is what we experience especially when we receive Holy Communion. Jesus Himself bore witness to the reality of this unity when He said, *He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I in him (Jn. 6:56)*. This then, is our union with the Son, a union brought about through the Eucharist. Our Lord also said, *As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so he who eats my flesh will draw life from me (Jn. 6:57)*. If we but take these words at face value, we see how great is our dignity; that God Himself shares His life with us and we also see how absolutely necessary it is for us to examine how and with what dispositions we approach the Altar for Holy Communion. Our devout participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is a clear expression of our understanding that the desired end or goal of our participation in the Church's sacramental life is an experience of and a participation in the Mystery of God's life, a *mutual indwelling*; a communion with the Father, and the children of the Father, God and neighbour. The Mass is a weekly reminder of the transcendent purpose of our life.

Salvation then is not something external – simply a state received; but a sharing in the communion of life that is God. It is a work that Jesus accomplishes both for us and with us. If this is what we affirm to be true about revelation and salvation, then we must also affirm that God can only be truly known in a *personal* way; through prayer. When we arrive at this truth, everything changes. We

change for we deliberately endeavour to be transformed into God's likeness. We become aware of our dignity, we recognize the dignity of every person and we begin also to understand the mystery of the Church *established by Jesus Christ as a communion of life, love and truth* (*Lumen Gentium*, 9).

This life is ours because of our Lord's Paschal Sacrifice. An ancient Christian author explained: *The knowledge that Christ is the Passover Lamb who was sacrificed for us should make us regard the moment of His immolation as the beginning of our lives. As far as we are concerned, Christ's immolation on our behalf takes place when we become aware of this grace and we understand the life conferred on us by this sacrifice* (Pseudo-Chrysostom, *An Ancient Easter Homily, Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. II, pp. 645). What is more, our Lord unites each one of us to this sacrificial offering. Through the Apostle Paul our Lord exhorts us: *I appeal to you ... by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship* (Rom. 12:1). St. Peter Chrysologus further explains: *Each of us is called to be both a sacrifice to God and His priest. Do not forfeit what divine authority confers on you. Put on the garment of holiness.... Keep burning continually the sweet-smelling incense of prayer. Take up the sword of the spirit. Let your heart be an altar. Then with full confidence in God, present your body for sacrifice. God desires not death, but faith; God thirsts not for blood, but for self-surrender; God is appeased not by slaughter, but by the offering of your free will.* (St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon 108, Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. II, p. 772). The offering of our very selves in imitation of our Saviour is a logical consequence of this mutual indwelling that is ours in Christ our Lord who has left us an example; that we should follow in his footsteps (Cf. *1Pet. 2:21*).

Our awareness and understanding of the life conferred on us by the Sacrifice of Christ as well as our own participation in this redemptive sacrifice is not simply theoretical. Each one of us in our own way is united with Christ our Saviour in His Sacrifice in our spiritual worship. Last week we celebrated here in our church the funeral Mass of Fr. Richard Love, a priest of our diocese. For seven years Fr. Richard was confined to a hospital bed, paralysed as a result of a stroke. He died at the hospital here in town, having been a resident at the extended care wing for about a year. When I would visit him and pray with him he would sometimes stop as we prayed the Lord's Prayer. *Thy will be done.* He would say, *'You know, I really mean these words'*. Yes, he did mean them. *God desires not death, but faith; God thirsts not for blood, but for self-surrender; God is appeased not by slaughter, but by the offering of your free will.* What a grace for our parish that this blessed life should end here, and what a grace it was for me to be with him as he drew his last breath and gave his life back to God. I share this with you because our Lord has deigned to give us an example right here in our midst of what it means for each one of us to offer Him our spiritual worship. *Each of us is called to be both a sacrifice to God and His priest. Do not forfeit what divine authority confers on you.* Each Sunday, daily even, we have the privilege of celebrating the immolation of Christ sacramentally in the Eucharist. Each Sunday is truly a new beginning of our lives until at last, having gone from Sabbath to Sabbath we enter into the rest of God in the eternal Sabbath; when God the Father calls us to Himself to dwell in the Heavenly Jerusalem, the city that gleams with the splendour of God (Cf. *Rev. 21:11*). Each and every time that we celebrate the sacraments we are *conformed to the mysteries of God's mighty love* (Cf. Prayer over the Offering, Sixth Sunday of Easter, *The Roman Missal*). Please God, our celebration of the Easter Mystery has brought us to a deeper knowledge of the life that is ours in Christ. As we look forward now to the glorious Feast of Pentecost, may we continue to strive *to learn Christ* (*Eph. 4:20*); and that we *may be filled with the fullness of God* (*Eph. 3:19*).