

**Sixth Sunday of Easter (A)**  
**May 21, 2017.**

*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).*

This is a promise fulfilled through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of salvation 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 perfectly describes this mystery is *mutual indwelling* (*perichoresis*). Our Lord says, *Abide in me, and I in you (Jn. 15:4)*. Our Lord dwells in us by virtue of His humanity 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)*; 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)*. 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. For this reason, we speak of the Church as a living communion with Jesus Christ. In Him we are all united. The Mass is a weekly reminder of the supernatural purpose of our life. We know this as disciples of Our Lord; and our willingness to learn anew and in an always deeper manner the implications of these truths enables us to be formed into missionary disciples exhorted, instructed and formed by divine teaching: *Beloved: in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence (1 Pt. 3:15)*.

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. When we consciously affirm this truth; that is, when live in the awareness of this, everything changes. We change for we deliberately endeavour to be transformed into God's likeness, the God who for our sake *became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8)*. 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).

In the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass Our Lord unites each one of us to this sacrificial offering sacramentally re-presented. St. Paul understood this truth and in his suffering for the sake of the Gospel, he *lived* this truth. So much so that he exhorted the Church with these words: *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)*. The offering of our very selves in imitation of our Saviour is the 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. Let me give you an example. I heard recently about a Jesuit priest who for years very faithfully exercised his ministry as a teacher. Then he was diagnosed with cancer and had to move to the community infirmary. As he dealt with his illness and its challenges, he did something unique. He put a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in his infirmary room and sent out emails to his confreres and people he knew asking for prayer intentions. He had no intention of wasting his suffering. When faced with another surgery he would send out emails requesting intentions. He prayed for everyone and anyone. When he learned that his leg would be amputated, he sent out another request for intentions. He knew the value of his suffering. This priest understood not only theoretically but experientially what it means *to present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God*, and in so doing he did not waste the suffering that enables us to be one with Our Lord in His saving work.

We possess a wisdom that enables us to understand that human suffering can share in Our Lord's Redemption. This is the wisdom of the Cross, *folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God* (*1 Cor.* 1:18). In his Apostolic Letter on the Christian meaning of human suffering, Pope St. John Paul II explained that *it is suffering, more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace that transforms human souls* (*Sacrifici Doloris*, 3). *In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, [Our Lord] has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption* (*Sacrifici Doloris*, 5). What this means for us is that all love expressed in human suffering enters into a dimension which is at once completely accomplished and in a certain and real sense, constantly being accomplished. This dimension is the dimension of Redemptive Love and it is a dimension in which we are active participants because our love and God's love are united. If this sounds mysterious to you, it should; because our life in Christ is meant to be profoundly meaningful. Let us not waste our suffering. Even more so, let us be aware of the value of our voluntary sacrifices.

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. 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*). As we look forward to the glorious Feast of Pentecost, and the outpouring of the Spirit of Wisdom, may we continue to strive *to learn Christ* (*Eph.* 4:20); that we *may be filled with the fullness of God* (*Eph.* 3:19).