

6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER, 17 MAY 2020

Loving the Lord, Keeping His Commandment and Receiving the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

How many of us followed the holy Mass last Sunday through streaming? For those who did, you might remember that the theme of the homily was Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. This Sunday, the Lord who is the Truth, the Way and the Life invites us to love him and to keep his commandments. You know what happens when we do this? We receive His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth and the Advocate. In our Lord's own words, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows him" (John 14:15-17).

In other words, the Lord who made us, gave his life for us and sanctified us wants us to give him our hearts, minds, souls and strengths so that we can be one with him. Surrendering ourselves in this way

makes it possible for his Spirit to find a home in us and guide us to the fullness of truth and life.

What can one do to love Jesus and keep his commandments? The Holy Spirit tells in the epistle of John, "God is light; in him there is no darkness. If we say, "We have fellowship with him," while continuing to walk in darkness, we are liars and do not act in truth. But if we walk in light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:5-7). In other words, one must walk in the light. So, is it not enough to say, "I attend Mass at St Augustine or Holy Rosary when I can and I do my best to give tithes when I feel like it? What more do you expect of me?" The answer can be found in how you spend your spare time. What constitutes your leisure and priorities? What do you do with your spare time and what are your priorities? Last Sunday was Mother's Day, did you reach out to your mother and the mothers in your life? Is there anyone in your family with whom you are not on speaking terms? Do you indulge a bad habit that ruins your health and saps your energy to do all the good you can? Does prayer come within your radar? Do you embrace a world

view that is totally unchristian because of political gains and because it feels comfortable or culturally right to you? The Lord said, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Our wills need to align with the will of God. What we want to do must always harmonize with what God wants of us. Our perspective on life must be shaped by the culture of life, the culture of love, the culture of the Ten Commandments. This is a higher culture and not simply the culture we see outside and in the media.

The gift of the Holy Spirit sets us on the right footing. "By receiving the Holy Spirit, who is the bond of union between us and Christ our Savior, those who are joined to him, as branches are to a vine, share in his own nature."¹ This will be as visible as the city of Venice or Memphis. St Cyril said,

The proof that we are living in him and he is living in us is that he has given us a share in his Spirit. Just as the trunk of the vine gives its own natural properties to each of its branches, so, by bestowing on

¹ Cyril of Alexandria, A commentary on the gospel of John, I am the vine, you are the branches, Office of the Readings Tuesday, 5thWeek of Easter.

them the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, the only-begotten Son of the Father, gives Christians a certain kinship with himself and with God the Father because they have been united to him by faith and determination to do his will in all things. He helps them to grow in love and reverence for God, and teaches them to discern right from wrong and to act with integrity.²

Examples abound of those who attained this and other unimaginable heights in life because of their surrender to Jesus! Four-time world heavyweight champion boxer, Evander Holyfield, also known as the Real Deal, said it all, “Without Jesus, I would n't be who I am.”

The Lord promised, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always" (John 14:15-16). Love of God opens the door for incalculable blessings. The evidence of this love is readiness to keep the Commandments. The command to love God and love one another as God

² Cyril of Alexandria, A commentary on the gospel of John, I am the vine, you are the branches, Office of the Readings Tuesday, 5thWeek of Easter.

loves us (John 15:12) sums up the commandments. In the life of the early Christians, people who opened their hearts to God received the Holy Spirit promised by Christ. The events in the first reading today illustrates this (See Acts 8:5-8, 14-17). Philip, not the Apostle but one of the seven deacons (Act 6:5), a husband and a father of a family of four virgin daughters (Acts 21:8-9) preached the gospel in Samaria. The Samaritans opened their hearts to Christ and were all baptized in the name of Jesus. Consequently, the Apostles, Peter and John were sent to confirm them and the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit. We must note the Apostles were bishops. Through the sacraments we receive the Holy Spirit promised by Christ. However, God is not limited to or by the sacraments. The requirement is open hearts and minds to Christ. Second reading says it simply, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts" (1 Peter 3:15).

To help us understand what will always happen when hearts and minds are attuned to the Jesus, our Lord said, "I am going away but I will not leave you orphans (John 14:8). I will come back to you (John 14:28). The Holy Spirit is our Lord's continued

presence in the world. The Holy Spirit is the Advocate and the Prosecutor to the world. He will convict the world of sin and righteousness (John 16:8) and he lead us into fullness of truth. Let us conclude with this song that ties in what we are trying to say: Praise to the Lord, Who doth prosper thy work and defend thee; Surely His goodness And mercy here daily attend thee. Ponder anew. What the Almighty can do, If with His love He befriend thee.³

³ Joachim Neander, Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, 17th century German tune.