

Easter 5

I take as my text today, from St. John's Gospel:

....for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be alway acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

Today is **Rogation Sunday**, one of those seasons of the **Church** that leaves many of us in this part of the world at a lost as to its significance.

The elaborate processions traditional on this day are a rarity in these times but in years past they were very important in the life of the parish. It was during the processions around the bounds of the parish that the fields were blessed with prayers for a successful crop.

So different from our English origins, so different from that which has developed in our own country. The bounds of a parish church today are so disconnected from the lands that surround it.

So, it is with the **Church** in general. For instance, sometimes, I think we tend to have a disconnect with the **Apostolic Age**, especially with the **Church** as it existed in the first century. So often, the **Church** of the first century is treated it as if it existed apart from the **Church** in the centuries that followed.

There are not two Churches: there is not the *Apostolic Church* and the *Modern Church*. There is *one Church* — *One Holy Apostolic and Catholic Church*.

The turn of the first century saw the **Church** coming into its own.

The last of the original Apostles helped make the transition into the second century. St. John, who lived into the Second Century, dying at Ephesus around the year 105, had just completed his Gospel a few years before his death.

There were notable saints and theologians of the Church, who spanned the turn of the century, owing their discipleship to John, most notably St. Polycarp, one of my favorites, bishop of Smyrna, who was martyred in the year 155, and St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, martyred in 107.

The foundations of the Church were well established by the end of the first century; it had become an organized institution with forms of worship, officers and leaders, and the order of clergy. It was collecting, organizing, and preserving written documents, especially the letters of Paul, Peter, James, and John, as well as the writings of others, such as Saints Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement the 1st, and the documents that were to become known as the synoptic Gospels, those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Without a doubt, many documents produced in the early days of the Church were lost, most certainly many of the documents produced by Church leaders communicating amongst themselves and with other churches. Evidence of that is quite clear in what has survived; yet those that were essential and basic to its foundation survived.

As the first century comes to a close and the second century begins, we find the Church thriving and we see St. John writing his Gospel; most likely dictating his Gospel, as he was quite old and frail, supposed to be in his mid to late nineties.

John outlived them all, enduring hardships, torture, deprivation; yet rebounding stronger with each encounter. And one of his greatest strengths was *love*.

That was the mark of John; indeed, his legacy might be said to be two-fold: that of theologian, and that of love.

So, it is no surprise that in today's passage from St. John's Gospel, we discover something basic and fundamental to our relationship with God: because God loves us, we can approach him directly.

God is about love; the New Testament is the story of God fulfilling his love for us.

Jesus demonstrates this love: first by taking on our flesh, second by dying for us, and third by loving and trusting his disciples to carry on in his Name.

He tells His disciples, *for the Father loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.*

Oftentimes, we think of God as being an angry God, as the *God of Wrath* depicted in the Old Testament. Then, we think of Jesus as having turned God's wrath into love.

But if we listen carefully, we find that Jesus is telling us that God has always loved us, and it was because of this love for us that he sent his Son into the world.

Jesus did not change God into love; rather, he brought to us God's love so that we may know, understand, and experience it.

In this context, we may look at the Old Testament as the story of a loving father preparing his children for something very wonderful that was to come, while the New Testament is the story of God fulfilling his love for us in a New Covenant.

Perhaps, even more revealing of God's love is the trust that Jesus places in his disciples. He tells them, *Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that you will be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone...*

Knowing what will happen when he is taken into custody, Jesus, nevertheless, loves them and retains complete confidence and trust in his disciples that they will, in the end, choose to be his instruments of peace and love in the world.

It is a love and a trust that overcomes the darkest of moments, the direst of times: it is this kind of love that Jesus brings to us from God: the ever-present love of God that is in and through us. Just as he, though abandoned by his disciples, was not alone, so we, who live in the love of God, are never alone.

We are never alone: that is a certainty of God's love. We who are members of the Family of Christ are never alone, never without God's love, and sustained always by his Grace.

Moreover, just as he had for the disciples of Jesus, God has a plan for each of us: a calling in life that is revealed through prayer and meditation. For this end, he has endowed us with talents and abilities and expectations.

God is our heavenly Father who, when we fall short, is there to pick us up. When we face the darkest of times, he is there through the Holy Spirit to strengthen and comfort us. When we feel abandoned and alone, he is there through our Lord and Saviour to lift up our spirits and refresh us with his Body and Blood.

God is always there because he loves us and trusts us to love him and to strive to do his will.

In the Comfortable Words leading up to the Prayer of Consecration, we are ever reminded that: God so loved his Creation, and us, the pinnacle of that Creation, so much that he sent his only begotten Son into the world to bring us tangible evidence of that love.

And he tells us through his Son, our Lord and Saviour, that, whenever we are burdened with the labors and trials of this world, he tells us to come to Him and He will refresh us.

Even though we are sinners, through Jesus Christ we can attain to everlasting life.

If we set aside all the deep theological considerations, what John reveals to us simply in his Gospel is the complete love of God for us and that we are his children.

John, the Beloved Disciple, in his dying words, gave us his charge: ***Little children, love one another.***

When asked if that was all he had to say, he replied, ***It is enough, for it is the Lord's command.***

Indeed, it is.