

SERMON EASTER 6A 2020.

My friends we gather to celebrate this 6th Sunday of the Easter Season, Our Easter Season is moving towards its climax, with this week the 40th day, ascension day on Thursday, and then that special period of 10 days leading up to the great feast of Pentecost, the 50th day after the resurrection. Appropriately in our Gospel reading we have heard Jesus promising his disciples to send them the Holy Spirit, or as he describes it "The Advocate", the Spirit of truth, that although he will be leaving them, he will not be abandoning them, but the gift of the spirit will comfort, console and inspire them, and as he says elsewhere, will teach them and remind them of all that he said to them- through the spirit he will be alive and active to them every day.

So today, like those first disciples we are encouraged to persevere and remain steadfast, and we are asked to show that, as Jesus says today, by keeping the commandments, Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." So if we love Jesus, we must remain faithful to him and show it in our Christian lives of faithfulness to the great commandments of Love, turning away from sin off course and having a special care for those most in need. And if we remain faithful and obedient, Jesus will always remain faithful to us, and God the father will remain faithful to us and love us. The guarantee of all this is the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit who Jesus sent from heaven on that day of Pentecost, anointing those disciples so powerfully, with those famous tongues of fire over their heads, that other symbol for the Holy Spirit. The power that came upon them that day fulfilled the promise Jesus made to them in today's Gospel, that he would not abandon them, but would still be with them. We heard an example of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles, with the ministry of one of the first Deacons Philip. Not long after the martyrdom of Stephen, that first Christian community in Jerusalem underwent a time of persecution and many of the believers scattered, proclaiming the faith as they went. We heard of Philip doing this in a Samaritan town, Samaritans, as you may know were a kind of Heretical Jewish sect, who refused to worship in Jerusalem, they though accept the faith that Philip preaches and then when Peter and John visit them to see if this is Ok, its proved to be Ok because they see the holy spirit come down upon them in the same way as it had on that first Pentecost day. This was a big moment in the Churches history, as the Gospel is preached to others outside the Jewish communities, first to the Samaritans, and then by the work of Paul, to the pagans, those of the Greek and Roman world.; a work inspired and anointed by the holy spirit. That by the spirit all divisions could be brought to an end, that mankind could be restored to unity, all divisions could be healed by coming to faith in Christ, healing the divisions between Jews and Samaritans, and between Jews and pagans. The spirit building unity in faith in Christ.

Might I suggest that we all try to make a especially prayerful preparation for Pentecost this year, praying for the power and grace of the spirit to be with us and this afflicted world. There is a tradition of a Novena of prayer beginning on Ascension Thursday, through till Pentecost 10 days later. I have placed such a Novena on the parish website, with prayers and reflections. Asking for Gods blessing on our world and church and families, to heal all of us and bring us safely through these days and for an increase in faith. Please do consider undertaking this Novena or another such cycle of prayer etc., or perhaps taking part in evening prayer each day at 5pm on our parish facebook page.

Could I ask you to pray for our parish most especially, to pray for our unity and fellowship, for all who worship here and perhaps for those who don't, to pray that we might be a parish that reaches beyond itself, reaches out to those who do not join us for prayer and worship. To pray that we will be an especially warm and welcoming parish with open doors to newcomers, that this may be a place where all can grow in faith, especially children and young people. This something the parish evangelisation group has spent a lot of time thinking about, most especially thinking about what kind of parish we want this to be, what our ambition, our vision for this parish is. We are developing a vision or ambition statement for the parish, what we would like this parish to be in 5 or even 10 years time. What we want our worship to be like, our outreach to the local community, links with our school, our lives of prayer, what our ambition is, what we want this parish to be. Much more on this to come- it is off course all reliant on Gods blessing and especially the power and grace of the holy spirit, hence the 10 days of prayer between ascension and Pentecost.

Finally we also heard the words of St. Peter today, writing to an early christian community undergoing difficulties, perhaps persecution of some kind. His advice was simple and clear – Reverence the Lord Jesus in your hearts, similar to our lords words in the Gospel, love me and love the father. That is such a lovely word Reverence, to revere, or as in some translations to sanctify. To revere, to treasure Jesus as that greatest of things, to love him and obey him, above all other things, knowing that he will always love and treasure and revere us. Amen.