6 Easter B 2021

These Sundays of Easter, a single word speaks the heart of Easter. It’s a word that makes sense out of Good Friday. It’s a word that can explain why you are a Catholic Christian, and a Franciscan. That single word is *“life”* – new life, divine life:

* the Bread come down from heaven gives *life;*
* the Good Shepherd lays down His *life* for the sheep;
* the Vine gives its *life* so the branches produce fruit.

This new life is given to by the Risen Lord Jesus—our Way, our Truth, and our Life—

* that we have this life and have it abundantly,
* He may live in us, and
* that we may live in Him.

Another single word:

* this word does not compete with life for paschal importance;
* this word puts flesh on life;
* makes life come alive;
* tells you more truly whether your life is Christ’s life;
* this word is—*Love.*

*“This is My commandment, that you love…”*

The problem is today, especially when the word *love* is well worn, overused, misused, at times defiled. It’s not easy, so that it makes human and Christian sense.

2

Jesus loves His friends with a perfect self-sacrificing love, the model of how we are to love. We can quickly believe that the saints and martyrs managed to share Jesus’ great love. But we find it hard to believe that we share it in our everyday life, which seems far removed from a love *that lays down its life.*

Sometimes a brother will be moved by love to donate a kidney to his diabetic sister. On a rare occasion, an unknown hero in harms way, will push others to safety.

But we find it just about impossible to keep believing that self-sacrificing love—in fraternity life—motivates us as we go about our day. Yet, the One who loved perfectly was quite explicit*—“This is My commandment: love one another as I have loved you.”*

We have no doubt about the way Jesus loves us. He makes us realize what St Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia: *“He loved me, and sacrificed Himself for me.”*

Jesus taught us how to love*—“that He gave up His life for us; and we, too, ought to give up our lives for our sisters and brothers.”*

3

But we prefer not to live the Christian paradox—that Crucifixion leads to Resurrection; that death leads to fullness of life; that laying down one’s life is the only way to have it lifted up to heavenly heights.

The world is in search of a second opinion, life the so-called “prosperity gospel” that says the eye of the needle is plenty big enough to squeeze through if only they apply themselves.

There’s no way around it. Can this have *real* meaning for us? Can we expect ourselves to love so much that we could die for one another?

Jesus’ way of loving is not limited only to spectacular moments:

* Father Damien among the lepers at Molokai;
* Mother St Teresa in the streets and slums of Calcutta;
* St Thomas More’s heroic verve on the scaffold—flicking his unoffending beard out of the axe’s way—recalling his long years of faithful service and prayer;
* Archbishop St Oscar Romero’s final bloody offertory—while reflecting on the hard hours he spent worrying his Christian witness—free from entangling partisan politics.

4

Easter life is to be alive in Christ. It is love that tells what life means. God’s life in us is a friendship—a relationship that graces us to love as Jesus loves—learning how to lay down our life for our brothers and sisters, in our time, in our fraternity, and in our society.

Eternal life comes by way of relinquishing mortal life. St Francis found perfect joy on a rainy night when he was beaten, abused, and cast into the mud. Good enough for him, but we prefer to find our joy in drier and more cheerful environs. Joy is a byproduct of surrender, not acquisition. We empty ourselves to receive it.

Remaining in Jesus’ love is contingent upon keeping His commandments. Jesus Himself says so—that we love one another in the same spirit of His love for us. The commandment curves back on its outcome—love from love, and love for love. This is the kind of love that uplifts the sons and daughters of God to the status of friendship, fraternity—capable of true witness that Jesus is the Lord we imitate.