

Homily for the Sixth Sunday of Easter – Year A



Easter Candle 2019
painted by Moya Hogarth

Two themes arise from our readings today, Hope and Love. We are reminded not only of all the reasons for our hope but the need to share those reasons with others. In today's first reading Philip is one of the Christians scattered by the persecution that arose after the martyrdom of St Stephen. That did not deter him or the other apostles from evangelising. The Apostles had remained behind in Jerusalem, despite the persecution, but when they heard of the work Philip had been doing in Samaria, they knew they had something to give as well: the Holy Spirit. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that brings us true hope in the promise of the risen Christ.

In the second reading St Peter reminds us that we must always be ready to share the reasons for our hope with others. We have received new life in Christ through our baptism and confirmation. It is our duty to give others the opportunity to receive new life in Christ as well. It is by our way of living that we witness to the reality of God's love in our lives. We show that hope has transformed us and sustained us. It is thanks to hope that we sanctify Christ in our hearts. It is not just what we explain, but how we explain it that lends credibility to our message through gentleness and reverence.

It is in the gospel reading that we are led deeper into the message of Christ to his apostles at the last supper. Jesus' constant refrain throughout the last supper was "If you love me you will keep my commandments", and His commandment is this, "love one another as I have loved you."

He was to show that love by his humble act of washing his apostles' feet and by sharing with them the first Eucharist. Jesus knows that the twelve are just ordinary men with all the limitations that apply to all of us. They were weak and ignorant, stubborn and headstrong but he knows that they really loved him. Their faith in him would be tested over the days of Christ's passion and death but find restoration and healing in the Resurrection narrative. We see Peter being challenged by Jesus "do you love me", when his three times acknowledgement of his love replaces his three times denial of Jesus during Jesus trial. The call to love by Jesus was a call not to words but to action.

I am reminded of a story told to me of a group of salesmen who had been on a conference. They were running late on their return trip and in their rush through the airport one of the group inadvertently knocked a basket of apples off a table. Apples were everywhere. The group kept running and reached the plane just in time. All except one. He told his colleagues to go on without him and he went back to where the apples had been knocked off the table. He was glad he did. The young girl selling the apples as a sixteen year old blind girl. She was trying to recover her produce by feel, no one was helping all were trying to get to their departure gates. The salesman knelt on the ground with the girl and gathered the apples into the basket, replacing it on the table and rearranging the display. When he had finished he gave the girl some money to cover the cost of any damaged fruit. As the salesman started to walk away the bewildered blind girl called out "Mister, are you Jesus".

In such a simple incident we can see what following the commandment of Jesus is all about. It is in the simple acts of compassion, of kindness, that show us the true worth of others. Despite the difficulties faced during the Coronavirus there are so many examples of love exhibited by family, friends and neighbours as well as medical and caring professionals, that do truly witness to the hope that is there and on which we aim to build. Each one of us who claim to be a follower of Jesus needs to follow his command, "Love one another as I have loved you."