6 Easter B 2024

These Sundays of Easter a single word speaks the heart of Easter. This single word is *life.*  New life, redeemed life, divine life: the Bread come down from heaven gives life; the Model Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep; the Vine gives its life so the branches produce fruit. This new life the Risen Lord gives us, that we may life, and have it abundantly, that He may live in us and that we may live in Him.

Another single word is presented in today’s Scriptures. This word does not compete with life for paschal importance—it puts flesh on life, makes life come alive. This word tells you more truly whether your Franciscan life is Christ life. This word is *love. “This is My commandment, that you love…as I have loved you.”*

The problem is: these words of life and love may become trite, slip into the commonplace. The superficiality of daily use makes it seem that the word of God has become familiar and exhausted. It appears old in the context of human thought. But these words reveal its nature, that they are “new” because life and love reveal the Triune God, they come from beyond the world, and can never be absorbed by it. So, we read them again and again, discuss them and refer to them. This is a good thing, in order to restore to them their greatness and their mystery.

When the Son of God came to us, the event took place in the silent manner of birth. The coming of the Spirit occurred in a different way, as an irruption and a shock. Like a mighty wind, He came to us from the remoteness of God. The house was filled with the sound. Flames leaped up. The disciples were shaken, overwhelmed. Gripped by the power of the Spirit, they experienced an interior transformation, the fullness of the reality of Christ becomes clear to them, the glory of Christ overwhelms them.

St Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia: *“Christ loved me, and sacrificed Himself for me.”*  How does such understanding of love put flesh on Easter life? Easter life is being alive in Christ, to share God’s life. At this very moment the Risen Lord lives in you. You can cry out with St Paul: *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”*

It is love that tells you what life means. God’s life in you is God’s love for you. God’s love transforms you, changes you, makes you different. You become a person in relationship. A relationship that graces you with spiritual gifts beyond the sheerly human. Only love gives meaning. Without love, words are empty. Without love, knowledge and insight are nothing. Without love, the spiritual power of faith is lacking. We may have, through the working of the Spirit, an enthusiasm for self-sacrifice, so that we give of ourselves for the neighbor or for God, giving away everything for their sake, even that is nothing done without love.

Question. Should love that gives its meaning to everything, to everyday virtues, be no more than that? The gifts of the Spirit are connected with human talents. Love puts flesh on life as being the essential thing—love in the form of simple truth, goodness, beauty. Nothing superficial, but something real—reality in itself because it is pure in value and genuine in action, and powerful in the world. Are we not speaking of God, Christ who is Love incarnate?

Love gives significance to the gifts of the Spirit. It comes from the heart of God, from the Spirit’s operation—moderation in fullness, serene and strong, greater and deeper and richer than all that is unusual. Love is the power and disposition of God. It tells us that the world means something to God, that we mean something to Him, far beyond our comprehension. God has drawn the world and us close to Himself in Jesus, a closeness that becomes His destiny. Is not this relationship “the love of God?”

St Paul says that God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; that Christ who died for us, also rose again and sits at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. What else can the word of St John mean: *“God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son?”*

If God wished to receive us back into His favor after we had fallen away from Him, God could have done so without involving Himself. God is God. but now we hear that God *“gave His Son,”* that is, Himself. The love of God permitted the creature to approach Him, through the *“giving”* of Himself—by entering into history, living among us, and rising victorious over death and sin. This is the work of that love that St Francis lived, of which the New Testament speaks.

Jesus gives us this act of “self-giving” as an enduring presence through the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, drawing us into Jesus’ self-gift, union with God. Communion draws us out of ourselves toward God and towards unity with all those to whom He gives Himself. Love of God and love of neighbor are now truly united. We become “one body,” completely joined in a single existence, to continue His work in us and through us. Eucharistic communion is the reality both of being loved and loving others in turn. The commandment of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be commanded because it has first been given, a freely bestowed experience of love from within, a love shared with others.

St Francis laments: “Love is not loved.” Love grows through Love, because love is divine, it comes from God and unites us to God. Through this unifying love it makes us a “we” which transcends our divisions and makes us none, until in the end God is “all in all.”

Jesus stands before the Father for our sake where our new existence is rooted and grounded. The love by which we live should be the disposition and the strength in our relationships with all people, and with all creation.

