

Easter 6 / May 9, 2021

John 15:12

“This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Who loves you and who do you love? How do people show their love for you? How do you show your love for them? In our gospel Jesus speaks of God’s love for us and of our response to His love, in love for others. Love is a word full of power and of various meanings. Love expresses kind sentiments and deep emotions. Love is the power by which people lay down their lives for their family, friends and country. God’s love is the power by which people are transformed from children of wrath, to children of the heavenly Father. Love is the essence of God’s being, for as St. John wrote in his first letter, “God is love.”

Love is most profoundly expressed in actions of self-sacrifice. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this: that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you.” Jesus expressed the fullness of God’s love for us and for all human beings in the cross, by which He atoned for the sin of the world. St. Paul said that while someone might dare to die for a good person, “God demonstrates His love for us in this: While we were sinners Christ died for us.” Jesus died for us while we were enemies, so that we would become His friends, in the reconciliation of the cross. In Jesus we receive the power of God’s love in forgiveness. We respond to God’s love, by loving God and by loving one another as Jesus has loved us.

Jesus said, “This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you.” God’s love is more than a sentiment and emotion in the lives of those who believe. God’s love is more than a warm feeling of acceptance. God’s love is a power! It raises us from spiritual death to life in Christ. His love is the power by which we walk in newness of life, loving Him and loving others as He loves us. God’s love is the power! God’s love empowers us to live in accordance with His love, by keeping His commands, all of which are inspired and fulfilled in love; love for God and love for others.

In his gospel, John records Jesus saying, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.” Even as Jesus expressed His love for the Father and for us, through His obedience to the Father’s commandments, so we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to express our love for Jesus, by being obedient to His commands, all of which are fulfilled in love; love for God and love for our neighbours. The night He was betrayed Jesus said to the disciples, “This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.” God loves us, because “God is love.” We love, “because He first loved us.” We love through the power of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus has given that we may receive His love and live in His love, loving God and loving one another as He has loved us!

God expresses His love in actions! God expressed His love for Israel, by setting them free from slavery in Egypt. He entered into a relationship with them, by which they became His children. He showed them how they would live with Him in love as children, by giving them His commandments. Commandment is an ambiguous word in the world. We don’t mind giving commands to our computer and to other people, but we don’t like being told what to do. We like to be the commander. We don’t like being commanded.

Nevertheless, we need to be told what to do. We need rules and laws to live in a safe and ordered society. Not many people would want to live in a lawless state. When people are allowed to do as they please, the end result is a Darwinian state, in which the fittest survive and the strongest thrive. Read the book of Judges and see what it is like to live in a lawless land! We appreciate laws and commands when they benefit us, but we don’t like it when the authority tells us what to do, or to tells us we are in violation of the law.

Yet, God gave His commandments out of love, not as a restriction on our freedom, but to protect us from the cruel effects of an unhindered sinful nature. God gives His commandments to believers that we may know how to walk in His love, as children of God. Jesus in the gospel and John in his first letter, speaks of the relationship between God’s love and His commandments. His commandments are not burdensome. They are liberating! God gives His commandments, so that we would know how to live in the power and freedom of His love. His commandments teach us the proper expression of love in our relationship with Him and in our relationships with others. John writes, “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” Love is the fulfilling of the law, because the law is the expression of God’s love for His beloved children.

The law is God's love in action. The law is the guide, by which God shows us how-to live-in relationship with Him as the source of our existence. The law shows us how to live with each other as creatures of His making; and as sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus. Through His law God teaches us to respect one another as His creation, who share the same earth and who have the same needs of body and of spirit. Through His law God teaches us to honour one another as His children adopted in baptism for the sake of Christ. Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them." Jesus fulfilled the law, by putting God's love in action; loving God with His whole heart, soul and mind; loving His neighbour to the point of sacrificing His body on the cross, for the forgiveness of our sin and for the sin of the whole world. Jesus is God's love in action. In response to His love, we love one another, deeply and from the heart!

Love is always expressed in action, whether it is our love for God, or our love for our country, our family and friends. God expresses His love, first in giving Jesus into the world to share our humanity and to sacrifice Himself for our salvation. God expresses His love for us individually, by calling us to faith in Christ Jesus through the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit. St. John writes in his first letter "See what love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God." We are children of God for the sake of Christ Jesus. We live in relationship with Him and show ourselves to be His children, by walking in His love in accordance with His commandments, all of which express His love; all of which were given in love; all of which are all fulfilled in love.

Children of the heavenly Father walk in the love of the heavenly Father, because they are empowered by the Holy Spirit and inspired by the love of Jesus. John writes, "By this it is evident, who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil; whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother." We express our relationship with God as children by living in His love; loving Him as our Father, Christ as our Saviour and one another as sisters and brothers; children of the heavenly Father.

Jesus said, "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you." He commands love, because love is the essence of God. He commands love, because He was obedient to His Father's command and became our Saviour. He commands love, because He loves us and wants us to live in a loving relationship with Him, the heavenly Father and with one another; forgiving as He has forgiven us, treating each other with patience, dignity and kindness. No one has ever seen God in His divine essence, but we do see Him in the love we have for one another, in the faith and fellowship we share together in Christ Jesus. See what love the Father lavishes on us that we should be called His children. Let us love another even as He loves us, for the sake of Christ our Saviour. In Jesus' Name. Amen