

3rd Sunday Easter

Year C - (Series 2)

'It Is The Lord'.

In this Eucharist we proclaim that Christ is the Lord, the Lamb that was sacrificed and who is worthy to be given power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing. The apostles accepted every kind of humiliation rather than give up proclaiming his name.

(Readings: Acts 5: 27-32, 40-41. We are witnesses of all this, we and the Holy Spirit.
Apocalypse 5 :11-14 The Lamb that was sacrificed is worthy to be given riches and power.
John 21: 1-19. Jesus stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and the same with the fish.)

Generally speaking, most of us tend to grow up with the learned, or instilled idea that God cares about people, and that he loves each and every one of his children.

And the love of God for all his children, all people, is indeed, a comforting thought. But when we think about certain individuals in history, people like, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Idi Amin, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, Putin (?) And when we consider certain current events around the world, not least, all that is happening in Ukraine, right now, we cannot help but wonder, 'Is that actually true?'

Another, more personal example... Dina was a healthy, beautiful young woman, in her early 20's, whom I'd prepared for confirmation the previous year. Suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, she contracted CJD (more commonly known as 'Mad Cow Disease'). Over the months that followed, she became increasingly incapacitated, until eventually, she succumbed to a horrible, and tragically early death, a death that was extremely harrowing to witness.

If, as we say, if as we assume, God loved this young woman, why did he allow such an awful thing to happen to her? In fact, we hear of rather too many pitiful, heart-rending accounts of all manner of tragedy and suffering. We hear of babies born without arms or legs, children, physically or emotionally abused by their own parents, people afflicted by disfiguring impediments, or illnesses of one kind or another, victims of violence, or warfare, sustaining horrific, life changing injuries... sadly the list goes on and on!

And in considering all of that, how then, is it possible to reconcile such things with our notion of a loving God? How, we ask, can he allow these things to happen?

We are all well aware of the countless men women and children who are starving, people who would be happy to receive just a mere crust of bread. Could we tell them that God loves them? More than six million Jews were slaughtered during the 2nd WW. Didn't God love them? And if he did, did he also love the Nazi regime which masterminded their ruthless annihilation?

Without doubt, God truly loves all who suffer. He proved that when, out of love, he sent his Only-Begotten-Son to share our human life. And so much more than that to suffer terribly, in heart, and in mind, and in body, on our behalf. And yet, the question remains, 'Can God really love those who inflict atrocious, inhuman, suffering on others?' Well, as hard as it may be for us to accept, the answer is YES! God loves them too; and he loves them because God is love. And so, he cannot stop loving anyone.

God doesn't create evil people; they become evil all by them-selves. Somehow, they become twisted, and cruel, and callous, through events and circumstances we do not always understand. Even so, God's love for them never ceases, not even when they turn away from him.

And what about us? Does God love us; you and me? We can ask that question when we consider that there are billions of people who are living today, not to mention the countless legions who have gone before us. Each person is but a tiny, infinitesimal fraction of that total. How can God possibly have time and love, for each and every individual?

Then there is the question of our unworthiness. When we look at our lives, and examine our consciences, and our sinfulness, we might properly ask, "Do we deserve to be loved by God?" If people knew us as we really are, chances are they'd probably want nothing to do with us, never mind, 'love us!' But God, so we are told, and so we believe, knows everything about us. Nothing is hidden from him, not even our deepest, darkest secret thoughts. And that being so, how can we possibly believe that he still, actually, truly, loves us? Why should he?

Today's Gospel helps us answer these questions.

We have just heard John refer to himself as 'the disciple Jesus loved', a phrase he uses five times about himself in his Gospel. Understandably, there has been a great deal of speculation and conjecture (not all healthy) as to what John meant by that phrase. For instance, did he think of himself as teacher's pet? Or was he bragging to the other disciples that Jesus loved him most?

I, for one, cannot believe that it was anything as puerile, or as self-centred as that. I think John was so overwhelmed at the mere thought that Jesus truly cared for him, that he never got over it. This Jesus, whom he knew as the long-awaited Messiah, loved him, and accepted him just the way he was. It was a personal love, and it was real, and it was unconditional. And it made such a deeply profound impression on John that he always thought of himself as 'The disciple Jesus loved.'

Like the other disciples John was conscious of his faults. He knew that he was ambitious, and all his other failings, but he also knew that he could be himself when he was with Jesus because Jesus accepted him just the way he was.

As Jesus kept loving John, a wonderful thing took place, John began to love himself. He started to see that he was a person of true worth, valuable in the eyes of Jesus. That became the focus of his life. Everything revolved around it, and so he decided to call himself, 'The disciple Jesus loved.' And John was proud of that special title, but I am sure he would not mind if we borrowed it, for each and every one of us, all the billions upon billions of people throughout the whole world, all those who have come and gone, since the beginning of time, have just the same right to it as John did.

As the 13th Station of the Cross declares, 'We are each that beloved disciple'. Jesus loves us, every bit as much as he loved John. And he accepts us too, just the way we are. What hope, what encouragement this should give us. It should spur us on, at every moment of our lives, as we strive to be as worthy as we can possibly be of the love of our God, he, whose love for us is so real and absolutely unconditional.

As the psalmist extols us to sing out 'Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love endures for ever.'

Amen! Amen!