

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

St. John 15:9-17

You will hear people say that God loves you just the way you are. They say this mainly to excuse their own sins and pretend that there's nothing really sinful anyway. Well God does love you. He created you and He gave His life to save you. A mother and father, I am sure, love their child as they are. But does that mean that they don't want their child to grow? I imagine they love their child too much to leave them the way they are. That is why they care for the health of their child by making sure they eat wholesome food. That is why they care for the education of their child by making sure they go to school and do their homework. That is why they care for the well-being of their child and want their child to have friends. So loving someone just as they are does not mean not wanting them to grow.

Sadly, many use the idea of love as an excuse for tolerance when we should be intolerant, as a reason to excuse sin when we should condemn it, to turn a blind eye to behaviour which will only lead to misery. From time to time I have parents tell me that their child doesn't go to Mass and they don't know what to do. They tell me it's because they don't want to upset their child, they don't want their child to be mad at them, and they don't want church to become something which is forced on them but something that they choose for themselves. I ask them this—and it never goes down very well—why are they giving their child the choice to go or not? Do they give them the choice as to whether or not they go to school? Do they give them the choice as to whether they eat their vegetables or not? Do they give them the choice as to whether they go to the dentist or not? So why give them the choice about something which matters so much more than any of these things, and that is the salvation of their eternal soul?

The word “love” today is probably one of the most abused words in the English language. We say it everywhere from “I love coffee” or “I love those shoes” or even, and worst of all, “love is love”. It’s no wonder our society has effectively rejected love because no one really knows what it means anymore.

In the New Testament, written in Greek, there are four words for love. “Ερως” (*eros*) which means a romantic love, “στοργη” (*storge*) which means a family love, “φιλια” (*philia*) which means a brotherly love or friendship, and “αγαπε” (*agape*) which is the love of God for us. It is the highest form of love. It is a love that is perfect and complete because it is sacrifice. As St. John wrote: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life” (*Jn. 3:16*). It is a love that means that your sins and my sins were borne by God Himself and who suffered the most agonising death imaginable so that you and I could live. You and I are the ones who deserve to be nailed to the cross and hung there to die in agony, but it was God Himself who took our place on that cross. That is what love is. It is sacrifice.

When Our Lord said, “This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you” (*Jn. 15:12*), He means that we must sacrifice as He has sacrificed. “A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends” (*Jn. 15:15*), said Our Lord.

When a man marries a woman, he sacrifices his life for his bride. This is why a man wears black at a wedding. It is a sign that he has died to himself and has given himself over completely to his bride. When a mother gives birth to her child, her own body nourishes and feeds the life of the child within her, and in the pain of childbirth she brings forth a new life. These are moments of love because they are moments of sacrifice.

Today many are afraid to contradict those who do not profess the faith because they don’t want to upset anyone. Parents may let their children miss Mass because they don’t want to upset them. Priests may excuse the sins of his

people because he doesn't want to offend them. If you upset someone it doesn't mean that you don't love them. We confuse speaking the truth with being judgmental. Pope St. Paul VI wrote: "[I]t is an outstanding manifestation of charity [love] toward souls to omit nothing from the saving doctrine of Christ" (*Humane vitae*, 29). It means that if I truly love this person, I want them to know joy and to be free—and that is to know Our Lord. One of the common things that Protestants who convert to Catholicism say is, "why did no one tell me about the Eucharist?" In other words, you Catholics have God Himself right here in your midst and you didn't tell anyone.

For husbands and wives, if you love your spouse, give everything of yourself to them and never leave them alone if they ever doubt their faith. For mothers and fathers, tell your children about Our Lord and hold on to them for as long as you can and lead them to know and love the one, true faith. Parents have a great and noble place in salvation. Always seek the grace of God and always trust in His love for you. When you are at school or at work, when people speak against the faith stand strong and show them that this is who you are and think that, just maybe, the reason they hate the faith is because no one has ever told them about it.

Don't confuse "love" with "acceptance". It is not the same thing.