

6th Sunday of Easter 2021

On the Malone Road, just opposite our church, there is a place where a bouquet of fresh flowers is frequently laid, marking where Enda Dolan, a young Tyrone man in his first term in Queen's, was tragically killed on the 15th October 2014 – almost seven years ago, and still, someone remembers and comes to lovingly lay flowers. Love never forgets! We remember our loved ones when we visit their graves, or offer a prayer of remembrance on the anniversaries of their deaths. But of course, we also remember other significant occasions in life, such as birthdays, wedding anniversaries, etc. Remembering important events is embedded deep within the human psyche. The Bible witnesses to this, as it is a record of those who remember that “*God's love endures forever*” (*Psalms 117*).

After the resurrection, the disciples sought to remember everything about Jesus. They did so by repeating his words, and telling and retelling the stories about him - this is the oral tradition that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, drew on, and eventually collected and wrote down as the Gospels. In fact, scholars claim that the passion narratives of the Gospels are based on the practice and prayer of the very first Christians, who retraced again and again that last journey of Jesus through Jerusalem, visiting the places of significance on that epic journey.

We can easily visualise such a group of Christian pilgrims gathered in the Garden of Gethsemane and there hear them recall: “Here the Lord came to pray on the night before he died; it was here that Judas betrayed the Master with a kiss; here the Temple guard arrested Jesus.” Then, perhaps they would say to one another, “Let us cross the Kedron valley, to the High Priest's House, for it was there that the Lord was interrogated and mocked; and it was there too, that Peter denied knowing Jesus.” As that first generation of Christians retraced the last journey of Jesus through Jerusalem, moving gradually from Gethsemane to Calvary, they stopped at significant places to reflect and pray. In these ancient devotions there is an echo of what we now call the “Stations of the Cross”. Our word “station” comes from the latin word “statio” – meaning simply a “place of stopping”.

The Stations of the Cross are more than decorative, pictorial representations hanging on the church walls; they demand that we pause and look; that we pause and listen; that we pause and reflect; that we stop and lovingly remember. The Stations, and even more so, the Crucifix that hangs before us, says, *“A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends.”*

A radical edge to our faith is this – following Jesus isn’t merely a religion! Religion suggests truths to be believed, laws to be obeyed, and prohibitions to be observed. Christianity is much more than that – it is a personal relationship – a relationship of love for Jesus who has loved us more than we can begin to imagine. He says to us, *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain in my love.”*

Christian faith grew out of the belief that, in Jesus Christ, God had revealed himself as love. It was that realisation which enabled St John to write, *“God is love. God’s love for us was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son.”* As we gaze on the Crucifix before us, we see with the eye of faith, the length to which God’s love has gone for us. There we see what love looks like! Can we sense the power and possibilities within that love?

In so many ways the history of the world has been changed by generations of Christian men and women who strove to live according to the example of Jesus, *“love one another as I have loved you”*. Such love continues to change the world through the lives of those who keep faith with “Love incarnate”. Jesus has commissioned us *“to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”* This commission can only be fulfilled if God’s love continues to be revealed in your life and mine.

As a faith family, here in St. Brigid's, we are challenged, to live that Gospel injunction, and, thankfully, there are many examples of how we strive to do that: couples who faithfully witness to the beauty and the ideals of Christian marriage; parents, who by their Christian living, lovingly hand on the faith to their children; young people, who so enthusiastically, take part in parish faith development programmes; concerned neighbours caring for the housebound elderly; the quiet effective work of our Parish St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Parish Third World Group; the many parishioners who give of their time and expertise in parish committees; those who joyfully assist in the

liturgical life of the parish; the many acts of charity, and the generous and faith-filled prayers, that constantly punctuate the life of this parish community. All of this, and much more, is the living out of the Lord's commandment, *“love one another as I have loved you”*.

*“Give us the grace, Lord,
to look for you in the love of our brothers and sisters,
to discover your name in their faces,
to meet you in the heart of our life,
and to reveal to all people
that you wish to fill them with your joy and peace,
in Christ Jesus, your Son,
our Lord and Saviour”*. **Amen.**