6th Sunday of Easter 2022

As the old tribal chief lay dying, he summoned his three sons and said, “I must select a successor. Each of you must climb our holy mountain and return with the most precious gift you can find.” The first son brought back a huge gold nugget of great value – he said, “I can bring great wealth to our people”. The second brought back a magnificent steel sword – he said, “I will be able to defend our people”. But the third returned apparently empty handed. He said to his dying father, “When I reached the mountain top, I saw on the other side a beautiful land, where our people could go for a better life.” The old chief responded, “You shall succeed me. You have brought back the most precious gift of all: a vision of a better tomorrow.”

The Book of Proverbs says, *“Where there is no vision the people perish”* *(Proverbs 29:18).* Jesus has commissioned us to make God's vision for humanity a reality in our world, and we do that by keeping his word. Perhaps, *“heeding”* is more meaningful than *“keeping”,* as it implies “listening” and then “doing” as Jesus asks. What he asks us to heed is summed up in his great commandment, *“love one another” (Jn.13 34).* But Jesus did not give us this commandment, and then leave us to cope as best we can; he promised us an advocate, or helper, and declared, *“The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.”*

How, then does the Holy Spirit teach us and remind us of all that Jesus taught? By breathing the very breath of God upon the spark of our faith and *“fanning it into a flame” (cf 2Tim.1:6)*. That is why we constantly pray, “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love”. This “breath of the Spirit” that stirs in our hearts, is also frequently referred to as the “voice of conscience”.

Conscience is that inner voice that motivates us to do good and to avoid evil. The voice of conscience, which is the Holy Spirit, breathing within us, guides us towards what is good, bears witness in us to the truth, directs towards what is right (*cf R. Barron, Light from Light, 135),* and away from all that would sully our humanity – that is our humanity as envisioned by God in the beginning. With hindsight, we all can recall times when something within us urged to do good, and those occasions when we said “no” to sinful temptations – and sadly too we will all recall instances when we deliberately refused to listen to that inner voice.

Today, the Church declares “Blessed” a French woman, called Pauline Jaricot, who listened to her inner voice, and who, from small beginnings, began what was, in effect, a revolution in the Church. She was born just after the French Revolution and lived her formative years during the regime of Napoleon Bonaparte – a time of almost continuous warfare, and of terrible chaos in the institutional Church. Pauline realised, that her Christian faith, although deeply personal, was not a private matter, but a vision to be shared with others. At first, she became conscious of the plight of the uneducated poor in the city around her; then, her concern extended to all in the world who had yet to hear the message of God's love for them.

At the age of twenty, she asked a few of her friends to act as promoters by finding ten associates who would be willing to contribute one cent per week to fund missionary work. She named her group “The Association for the Propagation of the Faith”. Her idea spread gradually from parish to parish, until it was taken up by the whole Church; now one Sunday in the year is set aside when, worldwide, the faithful are asked to support the Church's missionary endeavour. Pauline Jaricot was nudged by her “inner voice” to live in a concrete and practical way Jesus’ commandment of love; she shared her vision of a better tomorrow with a few of her friends, and what began with a few cents, now supports the Church right across the Developing World.

The Spirit breathes upon each of us, just as it did upon Pauline Jaricot, stirring the memory of Jesus in our hearts. The voice of conscience directs us towards all that is good, true, and right, challenging us to take that initial small step forward. But, so often we hesitate, excusing ourselves by the belief the little we can do will make no real difference. Pauline Jaricot’s vison of sharing the message of God’s love for all people, and her collection of a few cents, initiated a revolution of love. We too, if we are attentive to that inner voice, can discover concrete and practical ways of living the vision of the Gospel.

*“Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.”* **Amen.**