6th Sunday of Easter 2025

On Sunday last, before a vast crowd in St Peter’s Square, Pope Leo XIV officially inaugurated his papacy by celebrating a solemn Mass. In his homily, the Pope first looked back to days filled with “intense emotion”, and said, “The death of Pope Francis filled our hearts with sadness. In those difficult hours, we felt like the crowds that the Gospel says were *“like sheep without a shepherd”* (*Mt* 9:36). He went on to say, “Then…..we experienced the days that followed in the certainty that the Lord never abandons his people, but gathers them when they are scattered and guards them *“as a shepherd guards his flock”*. The certainty that the Lord never abandons his people is the core message of today’s Gospel passage.

Towards the end of his homily, the Pope, with considerable passion, encouraged everyone, “Look to Christ! Come closer to him! Welcome his word which enlightens and consoles! Listen to his offer of love”.

Some might feel that if only we could see Jesus, and hear him, and witness the miracles he worked, as did the apostles, it would make such a difference – faith would be so much easier. However, the evidence of the Gospels is, that Jesus' physical presence in Palestine two thousand years ago, didn't make much of a difference; the majority of people found him puzzling; some thought he was dangerous; others that he was mad; even his closest friends betrayed him and denied knowing him. If that was the situation then, it would seem unlikely that his physical presence would make much of a difference today.

Yet, we know that Christian men and women of every generation have claimed to see Jesus, to hear him and to know him as a living person. We too, without any particular merit of our own, are numbered among those chosen to know Jesus and to witness to him. Of course, this does not imply a vision of Our Lord's physical presence, but rather a true understanding of who he is, an acceptance of that which he taught, and the motivation to live according to his example – as the Lord says, *"those who love me keep my word"*.

However, given our human frailty, we know that we cannot live good lives without God’s help. But to those who strive to keep his word, Jesus promises*, “my Father will love them, and we shall come to them and make our home with them”*. The extraordinary implication of this promise is that God dwells in us, dwells in our hearts! On the evening of his election, Pope Leo reminded us of this truth, saying, “God loves us….we are all in God’s hands”.

But Jesus, in today’s Gospel passage, indicates that the divine love which fills our hearts, is such a personal reality, it is named the “Holy Spirit”. St Paul writes*, “the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us” (Rom.5:5)*. This is the Spirit of whom, Jesus says, “*will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you”*.

Just recently, we celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation in the parish. On that occasion, we prayed that God would pour out the Holy Spirit on the boys and girls being confirmed, to strengthen them with his gifts and, anoint them to be more like Christ. Those gifts we named as, wisdom and understanding, right judgement and courage, knowledge and reverence, and wonder and awe in the presence of God. This same Holy Spirit dwells within each of us, and we have all received those gifts of his, enabling us to be like Christ.

The human heart is regarded as the centre of passion, conviction and love. St Peter exhorts, *“Reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts”.* It is the Holy Spirit of Jesus who, in penetrating the depths of our hearts, fills us with an intense desire to be faithful to the everyday things that build up the bonds of true relationships within our families, in the workplace, and in the community. We are thus enabled to live the new commandment of Jesus, *“just as I have loved you, you must love one another”.*

The Holy Spirit also enables us, gently but surely, to have the strength, when we are confronted with a crisis, in our personal life, or in the family, to face it calmly and with courage. Then we remember that Jesus promised, *"I will not leave you orphans"*!

Again, the Holy spirit gives us the courage to avoid compromise when we are confronted by the many forms human wickedness that abound in the world and to find peace in doing the right thing. Jesus has told us, *“those who love me keep my word”,* and he in turn “bequeaths his peace”, *“a peace that the world cannot give”.*

The great truth of our life is that God loves us; that is what makes everything else meaningful. Pope Leo declares, “this is the hour for love…..let us walk towards God and love one another” , and know the Lord’s gift of peace, in our minds, in our hearts, and in our souls. **Amen.**