

A Homily for the 6th Sunday of Easter from Fr Allan

You hear the phrase ‘Reality Television’ a lot nowadays. Apparently, it’s a cheap way of making television and maybe this shows itself in more ways than one! I wonder sometimes and I think that while it shows the ‘real’ side to human beings it can also appeal to the lowest common denominator in human behaviour. Some reality television will bring out the best in people. Some will bring out the worst and some will do a bit of both. We get little glimpses of different aspects of the world. We see the world in all its glory. We see the inglorious world and the vainglorious world.

As Christians we believe that God is the creator of the world. He saw that it was good. The television documentaries that are popular today will show how wonderful and beautiful God’s creation is. St John refers to the “world” on several occasions. He does so today in his Gospel from Chapter 14. For him the ‘world’ refers to ‘everything that is opposed to God - everything that is opposed to obedience to Jesus’ commandments. So, when the personalities of reality television act in completely selfish ways, in ways that deliberately set out to destroy the characters of others, or even, much worse, perhaps you could say they are acting according to the ‘world’ of St John. Of course, this isn’t only the prerogative of those who are involved with reality TV. We know that we too, can turn away from God and the commandments of Jesus. Our scriptures speak to all of us.

According to St John the world doesn’t see Jesus nor the Holy Spirit of truth. Faithful disciples do. The world does not love (in its Gospel meaning), nor does it see or have life. Faithful disciples are the ones who can see and understand. They can love in its truest and deepest sense and they know how to live full and authentic lives. They can do all this because they know that God lives in them. They know the love of the Father and they know that it is their call, their vocation to make this love known in the world. They know this because it is the Good News of Jesus that has told them.

The Gospel for today begins, “...if you love me you will keep my commandments.” Some people might think that commandments and laws are burdensome and restrictive. They curtail our freedom and liberty. We are hearing this a lot today when people object to rules that prevent them from leaving their homes or meeting their friends. They protest, amongst other things, in the name of freedom and liberty. Christian scriptures and especially the gospel this Sunday show us another way of looking at them. They ask us to see them as expressions of our love for God. Keeping commandments must always be within the context of love. Christians keep the commandments not because they think they have to “obey the rules”. They keep them because they want their lives to reflect the love that they are absolutely convinced comes from God. Their lives must reflect the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If keeping the commandments only breeds resentment, anger and fear then we are more akin to the world of St John or the world of some reality TV. As the Easter season progresses we are more and more reminded that because of Jesus’ resurrection we have entered into a most intimate relationship with God. So, Jesus tells the disciples that they (and us) are not alone. We are not orphans. (This is one of the few occasions when the word ‘orphan’ is actually used in St John.) We are the beloved of God. If only we could recognise this, the world would be transformed and the bad aspects of reality television would disappear.

On our own it is impossible to know God or to love God. This is why the Gospel is so reassuring when Jesus promises us the Spirit. The actual word that St John uses is equivalent to ‘Paraclete’. Jesus will send us the “Paraclete”. There are many translations of this such as

“Comforter”, “Counsellor”, “Guide”, “Advocate”. Indeed, when Jesus has departed we find that the Spirit has comforted the disciples; he has taught them; he has testified to the authenticity of Jesus; he has spoken out about sin in the world; he has spoken about the things to come; he has spoken about truth and hope! The Spirit is all of these things and we have now been incorporated into his being. Our calling is to be those things to the world.

Probably, I would say that the essence of today’s gospel - that is, that we are intimately a part of God’s life - that God’s life is within us, is an absolute prerequisite, precondition to our prayer life. This is where we begin - knowing that already God lives deep within our being. All of the goodness that we see and experience around us, all of the lives of the ‘faithful ones’ have their roots in God’s love for us.