

**Sixth Sunday of Easter – Year B
(May 21, 2006)**

It's All About Love

Easter is about two four letter words. The first and most obvious one is life. Easter is about life, new life and life in abundance. The kind of life that is so obvious in John's Gospel that we have been reading on the Sundays after Easter.

But Easter is also about another four letter word: love. And our readings today spoke to us beautifully and movingly about love.

So it is fitting that we spend some time today thinking of what we are saying when we talk about love.

It's probably one of the most abused words in our language. Our culture seems to make it equivalent to making love, and yet that is only a small part of what it means. The television dramas and sit-coms and day-time soaps have very little of the self-giving that is characteristic of the love that Jesus is talking about. "God so loved the world," he tells us, "that he gave his only son." We might add that the son so loved the world that he gave himself in the gift of the Eucharist and on the cross. And it's in that giving that we find the true meaning of love. There is the love that says, "I care," as when Jesus takes little children in his arms and blesses them. There is the intimate love of husband and wife that says, "You are dearer to me than all else on earth." There is the embrace that says "You are my friend." There is the love that speaks when the "I" that God created in God's own image and likeness goes out to another and says, in different degrees, to spouse, to stranger, to family, or friend, to man or woman or child, to human or to God, "You are part of me."

There can be love when I give bread to the hungry and water to the thirsty, when I clothe the shivering and house the stranger, when I visit the sick or all too rarely the imprisoned. There can be love when my eyes meet your eyes. There can be love between myself and a Jesus whose wounds I cannot touch like Thomas, love between myself and a God who lives within me without my being able to put my arms around Him. There can be love *if* . . . if the "I" that God shaped in God's own image and likeness goes out to

them, if I am saying, “You are part of me.”

And where does such love come from? Surely not from ourselves. Of ourselves we are incapable of it. John tells us in his letter, “Love then, consists in this: not that we have first loved God but that God has loved us and has sent his Son as an offering for our sins.”

And in the Gospel Jesus says, “Love one another as I have loved you.” Have you ever thought about what that means? I have always thought it meant love one another in the way that I have loved you. And of course it does mean that. But it can have another meaning as well: Love one another because I have loved you. In other words we can only love because God and Jesus have first loved us. It’s the love of God in us that makes possible all those impossible things that Jesus asks of us. “You have heard it said ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.’” Is this unreal? Not really. Not if we have grasped what Easter love means. Jesus is not asking us to go to bed with the enemy or to like the detestable. He is commanding us to care, to be concerned for every man, woman, and child we meet, who crosses our path. Not unreal if we ponder the word that we heard from John’s first letter: “Beloved, if God so loved us, (loved us so dearly that he gave his own son for our sins), we also ought to love one another.” Unreal? Not if we realize that what God commands God also empowers us to do. We can love as Jesus loved, that is, in the same way Jesus loved, not because we are supermen or wonder women but because God has first loved us and because God lives in us.

In our opening prayer today we prayed, “Ever living God, help us to express in our lives the love we celebrate.” The love we celebrate. The love that left heaven to take on our flesh and blood and bone; the love that learned to laugh with us and weep over us; the love that lived for the sinful and the hateful, for the despised and the despairing: the love that was crowned with thorns and consummated in crucifixion. That’s the love we celebrate. Is that really the love that we want to express in our lives? If it is not, if we love only those who love us, what more are we doing than the good pagan?

Remember: nothing is impossible for God. The love of God has made the impossible possible.