

EASTER 6
Acts 8:5-8;14-17
1Peter 3:15-18
Jn 14:15-21

Today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles tells us that the Church's mission was expanding into Gentile areas of the Middle East. Philip went to the Samaritans, a group hated by the Jews, because preaching about Jesus, healing and baptisms had taken place among them. Perhaps the Samaritan woman that Jesus encountered at Jacob's Well was partly instrumental in this growth. There was no evidence that the Samaritan converts had received the Holy Spirit, so Peter and John went to them to bestow this gift through the laying on of hands. This event is the Scriptural basis for the sacrament of Confirmation – the sealing of the candidate with the Holy Spirit.

Christian discipleship was, and still is, a risky way of life. The epistle of St Peter tells baptismal candidates that they will suffer because of the path they are taking. By saying, "Yes" to God, disciples generate hostility from those who reject or are indifferent to God. This reality hardly helps to persuade people to embrace the Faith but is it not possible to have a faith in a crucified God and not expect to share in his suffering. Travelling with Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life is hardly a walk in the park.

During the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples that if they loved him they would keep his commandments. The word 'commandments' has the ring of issuing orders during a crisis that should not be questioned –lockdowns during a pandemic get close to this. The Greek word for 'commandments' is more of 'following instructions.' Jesus is saying to his disciples that they should keep the standards of the Church by following his instructions themselves, through loving him and each other. Loving Jesus and loving each other are two sides of the same coin. To understand this we need to explore the relationship between Jesus and the Father.

Jesus shows us that he loves the Father by doing what the Father instructs him. "I came not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (Jn 6:38). Jesus expresses this through his acts of service to others in teaching, healing and raising them up. The Father loves Jesus by showing him what he, the Father is doing, and by giving Jesus authority and approving his actions. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17), and "This is my beloved Son, listen to him" (Mk 9:7).

This is the secret of being a disciple, namely that we love Jesus. We are loved not only by him but by the Father who sent him. This is a shift away from following written laws in order to do what is right and true, because God has bestowed the Church community of disciples with the Spirit of Truth. The Spirit of God's truth is the Paraclete, the dependable one who stands alongside the Church and her faithful. He is the wind of Reality blowing the truth of God through us.

The world operates by its own rules because it does not recognise God's truth. In the world, truth is what each person wants it to be, but the Spirit of God's truth is permanently

resident in the people of God. He is with the Church as we face the world and work out our inner spiritual life with him. In his book, "Behold the Pierced One (p127-8) Pope Emeritus Benedict says that "Our ministry is to hold up the flame of truth in the world and to affirm that God is, that God knows us, and that God is as Jesus Christ has revealed him, and in Jesus Christ, he has given us the path to life. He calls us to let heaven shine into this world, to build heaven here. Jesus stretches out his hand to us in his Easter message, in the mystery of the sacraments, so that Easter may be *now*, so that the light of heaven may shine forth in this world and the doors (of our personal dungeon) may be opened. Let us take his hand!

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