

Homily
Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 5, 2024

Happy Easter! "As the Father loves me, so I also love you." This is the love between the Father and the Son, between brothers and sisters, between us, the children of God, and our heavenly Father. Just as the Israelites entered the promised land, we have our promise of a place in heaven, for those who believe. What do you believe?

And why do we celebrate 50 days of Easter? I don't know about you, but I can't eat chocolate Easter bunnies for seven weeks and a day! It seems like we put more energy into Lent than Easter. We spend forty days preparing for Easter, we pray, we give alms, we repent, we forgive, we fast, we abstain, we look forward to the Resurrection, and then we celebrate Easter as if it's a single day. But Easter isn't just a day. It is a season that lasts 50 days! We are on Day 35 of what should be celebrated as a single joyful feast. And consider that 50 days is about one seventh of the year and Sunday is one seventh of the week. Coincidence? I think not. That's why we call Sundays 'little Easters.'

The celebration shouldn't temper down, it should crescendo, it should be enthusiastic and loud. This is a period of fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday, a time to remember that Jesus wasn't in a rush to take His place at the Right Hand of the Father, but that he spent time appearing to his disciples, preparing them for Pentecost, preparing them to receive the Holy Spirit. This is an extended time to blissfully celebrate the Resurrection. After all, the Resurrection changes everything. St. Paul writes, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." *1 Corinthians 15:14*

Easter is a big deal. Consider what Pope Saint John Paul II said, "Do not abandon yourselves to despair. We are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song."

We should make today's Gospel our meditation for the rest of Easter. Jesus wants us to experience joy, not just any kind of joy, but the joy of Jesus. He wants us to have His joy in us so that our joy may be complete. Jesus commands us to love one another as He loves us. Jesus died for our sins; this is the example He has given us, to lay down our lives for our friends. We pray for each other; we intercede for each other; we sacrifice for each other, even when it hurts. We didn't choose Him; He chose us, to go and bear fruit that will remain. We may have to get our hands dirty. Loving others isn't always easy, but it is simple; we just have to discern what God wants us to do and just do it.

All of creation, all of Salvation History centers on this event – The Resurrection! In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. God established His covenant, first with Noah as signified in the rainbow in the sky, then Abraham, promising him land, descendants and blessing, then Moses, established with all the people of Israel, the promised land, then David, to reign on the throne over the people of God, and the hope for a Messiah, and finally the New Covenant, the one that can only be accomplished by the God-Man, fully human, and fully divine; in His humanity because we are too weak to fulfill these covenants ourselves, and in His divinity, because God is perfect.

Jesus became our Great High Priest and our Sacrificial Victim. He died so that death would have no more power over Him and He rose again, restoring life and opening the gates to heaven for all who believe. What do you believe?

John reiterates this divine love in our second reading, “let us love one another, because love is of God.” *1 John 4:7a* This is the mystery and the beauty of our loving Father; if we have trouble loving, ask for His help. If we are estranged from someone, in a heated disagreement, challenged with someone’s life choices, ask God to help. If we are having trouble forgiving someone, we ask God to forgive them for us until we are able. If we can’t forgive ourselves, we ask God to help us with that too.

God is great and only wants what is best for us, even if it’s not what we think is best for us (and probably isn’t). He wants what is best for you, for our neighbor, for our family, for everyone around us, for everyone around the world. He has big arms and can handle anything and everything we can throw at Him. “Whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another.” *John 15:16b-17*