

6th SUNDAY OF EASTER ESSENDON 2021
LOVE, FRIENDS NOT SERVANTS & MOTHERS' DAY
Jn 15.9-17 AA 10.15-48 1Jn 4.11-16

It comes up again and again, as we hear of Jesus' call to love. It's almost trite, we hear it so often, but here we go again! We are continuing to hear John's account of the long, ongoing farewell discourse of Jesus, with today's Gospel following on directly from Jesus as the vine and we the branches, expected to produce the good fruits of the Spirit, as we anticipate Pentecost in 2 weeks' time.

The call to love is at the heart of it all. We know it begins at home, and that it is far more difficult to understand love and to reflect it, if we don't have the good fortune to come into a loving and secure environment in the family scene from the start. Then again, we can't stay locked down into an inward-looking environment, protected from and escaping the real world out there, with which we must engage, can we?

When you think about it, here is Jesus preparing his disciples as friends for his imminent departure, and giving them words of hope and encouragement, to get out there and to face the world, with all of its uncertainties, challenges and unknowns, with the certainty that his presence will endure, despite the coming darkness of his rejection, suffering and death. He has shown the way through his public ministry and outreach to all along the way. His journey has been relatively short, as was his life in human terms, and yet, the powerful impact of his presence and ministry on relatively few people way back there, has set the pattern for us to follow, if we are to be his disciples who take to heart his promise that we are his friends, if we do what he commands us.

Jesus gives us the Beatitudes as principles to be applied in and attitudes to reflect, in living the Christian life, but he is very short on details and structures, almost implying that this will happen in an evolutionary way, depending on time and place, culture and traditions, so that his message can be applied in all sorts of diverse situations, as reflected in the first reading today, where Peter gets the message that Cornelius and his household are welcome to take up a commitment to Christian life and faith, without having to revert to peripheral Jewish cultural norms and practices. It is the law of love that is at the heart of the teaching of Jesus, and it is repeated constantly in this discourse, and in John's letters, as we also hear today.

Once again, too, the issue comes up about distinctions between individuals and practices, whereby Peter has woken up to the fact that God has *no* favourites, and that clearly comes directly from Jesus' ministry and teaching. He has set the example for us to follow, and yet, as we've been reflecting since Easter, the Gospels make this clear, but human history does not, with too much focus on differences rather than common ground, starting with our humanity, and responsibility to care for this fragile world into which we are born, and which sustains us.

And so to *Mothers' Day*, which is sometimes criticized for its commercial emphasis, but it can't go unnoticed, even though I got onto the idea of a flower for each mother this weekend too late, after we missed out being here last year, as I missed out on the Easter eggs this year too, with Aldi run out before I got there. At least I tried, to the good intentions were there! I guess we're all a bit out of gear after the disruption and anxieties of last year. With vaccinations now available and containment of the virus apparent in our communities, we are making progress and gaining confidence and more freedom.

There is nothing to compare with a mother's love, from our birth to the end of our life, as we stop to think of the unconditional love, care and nurturing they provide for us. At this time of year, I think especially of my own Mum, as an only child of elderly parents, thinking back on the way she raised 5 children (*I helped, of course, as eldest of 5 in 9 years!*), her parents living with us for part of that time, when we were young, and in primary school, not to forget Dad, who worked hard, supported and willingly accepted the circumstances of a rather large family, living at close quarters. We can take such things for granted at the time, but become more aware of the selflessness and sacrifices made when we look back, and appreciate that this was no easy task, balancing demands, budgets and needs of all, in the home environment. Many stories came out during the year at the funeral farewells to loving mothers and grandmothers, particularly words of gratitude and happy memories from grandchildren.

I was amused when my Mum was older and we were off her hands, in one way, as adults, and she expressed concern that she might be playing too much golf, which helped her get her mind off worrying about Dad, when he was suffering from motor neurone disease (although we didn't know it at the time). She thought perhaps she should be doing more to help others, of which she already did a significant amount, visiting older friends who were shut in at home, and helping to look after the grandchildren as they came along later! Then there were always things to worry about with her children, including me. I asked her who was going to worry instead of herself, when she was gone, trying to convince her that worrying, whilst a sign of love and concern, was not going to change anything really! She was amused by the thought, but continued to worry, in her own way!! As we all know, our mothers can't help themselves, when it comes to such things.

So, let's be appreciative of our mothers, and for those who act as mother figures and carers, for who they are, and for all they do for us, along our paths of life, at all of its stages and phases. And let's take them as role models for applying the law of love as proclaimed and lived by Jesus, as he commands us to remain in his love as his friends, not servants, and to share that love in our relationships with others, no holds barred, always more difficult than it sounds or looks in theory. He links his command to the universal love for all of a God of life and love, in the image of a loving and merciful Father, as he challenges us to produce the good fruits of the Spirit, as our Confirmation candidates are reminded in their preparation and at their presentation today before our faith community here at St Therese's. It's good to have you with us.

And now a short reflection for Mothers' Day titled: "My Mum Says the Strangest Things" (by Katrina Germein, illustrated by Tom Jellett), reminding us of a Mother's love, in amusing ways!

john hannon

9th May 2021