

We are in the 5th week of Easter and today the gospel reading takes us back to the eve of the crucifixion - to Maundy Thursday when Jesus and the disciples were gathered together for the Passover.

It is from this gathering that Judas departs to put into motion his act of betrayal and with his departure the glorification of Jesus begins.

When Judas departs the gathering we hear Jesus speak tenderly and gently to his disciples with words that are filled with personal intimate love – the Greek word for this love is agape:

Little children I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you. Where I am going you cannot come.

Jesus then pours out to his disciples his spiritual will and testament - the heart and soul of his whole message: *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples by the love you have one for another."*

Now in Judaic law, the Hebrews were called to love God with all their soul, heart, mind and strength and to love their neighbours as themselves - and this has always been central to the law.

So what is different about the love that Jesus commands his disciples to live - well it is that Jesus commanded them not only to love one another as they love themselves but to love one another as he loves them. This is the difference – this is what is new.

It is in fact the focus of what happened at the Last Supper in the upper room in John's gospel. The gospel writer does not focus, like the other gospel writers, on the symbolism of the meal and so on the Eucharist. He has already reflected on this in a previous chapter, he does, however, go to the heart of what the shared meal means.

We are sharing a meal with Jesus. He is giving us his love and it is this love, if we truly receive it that will generate in us the special love for each other which will identify us as his disciples.

Jesus is creating a holy, sacred covenant between himself and the disciples which emanates from, and is held together by agape – self –giving love.

This is the love that transforms people because once you have experienced it you want to share it. Agape love – in other words - generates its own energy.

The Christian mystics down through the ages from the first century – from St Antony, to John of the cross, Terese of Avila, Julian of Norwich and more recently Teilhard de Chardin, Beatrice Briteux, and Ilia Delio knew, and know about this way of love.

Collectively they write that agape is intimate creative union that unifies, draws together in oneness as it seeks the fullness of love.

It is the fire of love-energy that moves us forward in growth and understanding and it flows out of a 'communion consciousness'.

Now communion consciousness is far more than union awareness - it is a deep knowledge, an intuitive sensibility for intimate union. To express his deep knowledge Jesus used

metaphors like – *I am the vine and you are the branches - Abide in me as I abide in you, abide in my love, and– I am in the father and the father is in me. I and the father are one.*

So when we talk about communion consciousness we mean a deep knowledge of being and living in the intimacy of oneness through union.

In the reading from acts this morning we hear Peter putting this into action. He shares his visions, overcomes division and brings into unity gentiles and Jews alike.

The implications are endless when we consider ourselves living with a communion consciousness.

For example - we would view the creation as one with ourselves. Our stewardship of the natural world would be in the same realm as the way we care personally for ourselves and each other.

We would view diversity within humanity with acceptance, and welcome it without fear or suspicion in the power and energy of agape love.

This is who Jesus was and it is who he calls us to be.

This is, I believe, the New Jerusalem that has already begun - as revelation describes in the second reading this morning.

See the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them, he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Then he said to me, it is done! I am the alpha and the omega the beginning and the end. It is done – it is already here.

Now all this might seem a little daunting and way beyond our capabilities of love but we are not to get lost in the thought that we can never move into this way of love, for when Jesus tells the disciples that he would be leaving them, he tells them also that they will not be left orphaned, but that the father would send them the Advocate, the Holy Spirit who would teach them, lead them and accompany them.

The commandment to love as Jesus loved, I believe, is only possible within the intimacy of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives – which in itself is an expression of communion consciousness.

There is not an expectation that we can do it on our own.

Through the paschal mystery we are called to be people who live everyday life in the reality that God is right here in communion with us, in agape love, showing us the way.

And when we follow this way, others will see clearly that we are his disciples.

The Lord be with you.

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