

# Season of EASTER



## Prayers

### Collect of the Day

O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### Scripture Readings

Psalm 98 (antiphon v. 2)

Acts 10:34-48

1 John 5:1-8

John 15:9-17

### Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 556

Other Hymns – 548 (FR), 602 (E),

544 (G, E), 829 (G), 469, 490

In the peace and joy of the resurrection, let us pray to the Lord.

Gracious Father in heaven, pour out Your Holy Spirit upon us that, by means of Your Holy Word, the water of Holy Baptism, and the blood of the Holy Supper we would continue to confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and the Lord of all, receive the fruits of His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, and so show forth our faith in our risen Lord by loving others, by being fruitful in every good work, and by obeying His commandments: Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You have called your Church to witness to all the world that in Christ You have reconciled us to Yourself. Grant that by Your Holy Spirit we may proclaim the Good News of Your salvation so that all who hear it may, like the Roman centurion Cornelius, receive the gift of salvation: Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Lord and Ruler of all, gracious regard those who have been set in positions of authority among us that they may be high in purpose, wise in counsel, firm in good resolution, and unwavering in duty, that under them we may be governed quietly and peaceably: Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, as Your Son, our risen Lord Jesus Christ, healed all manner of infirmities and cured diseases, be with those who are in need of Your help [especially \_\_\_\_\_]. If it be Your will, free them from their sickness and restore their strength and health: Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Eternal Father in heaven, as Your own dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, was born of the blessed virgin Mary, so bless all mothers in their tireless work of nurturing and caring for the children You have given them. Grant them patience and diligence as they seek to train up their children in faithfulness and service to you, and forgiveness for the times they have fallen short in their divinely appointed task. And grant that all children would honour, serve and obey their mothers, and so love and cherish them as Your representatives: Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

*cont'd on next page.*

Almighty God, heavenly Father, as Your beloved Son rose victorious over death and the grave, we remember with thanksgiving this day our mothers who trusted in Him and who now stand in Your presence where all sorrows are turned to joy. Strengthen us in the confident hope of the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come that we may await with joy our reunion with them in Your heavenly kingdom: Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, heavenly Father, we commend all for whom we pray in our hearts, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our risen Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**



# EASTER SERMON

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

(Series B)

MAY 5, 2024

**Sermon Text: John 15:9-17**

*“Agape Love”*

The scene is the upper room, Jesus with His disciples. He had just finished washing their feet . . . and giving them His Body in the bread, and His Blood with the wine. He was now teaching them, and about to pray for them. And it’s in this context – the context of His impending death, His laying down His life for the life of the world – that He then says, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.”

The word ‘love’ comes up several times in the Gospel and Epistle Readings today. “Abide in my love . . . Greater love has no one than this, that he lays down his life for his friends . . . Love one another.” Love is a slippery word. Frightening sometimes. The Greeks had four words for ‘love’; unfortunately, we only have one in English.

The Greeks could speak of *storge* (‘store-gay’) – a nurtured, needy, compassionate love. A child nestling at the breast of his mother. What C.S. Lewis described as “all in a squeaking, nuzzling, heaping together, purring, lickings, baby-talk, milk, warmth, the smell of young life.” There is no need to command this sort of love. It’s instinctual.

Then the Greeks have *eros* (‘air-us’) – an erotic, passionate love. This is the love we fall into when we ‘fall in love.’ It is a sexual, romantic, moving love. The Song of Solomon speaks in these terms. Again, it requires no commandment – except to keep it properly confined to one man and one woman within the estate of marriage.

Then there is *philia* (‘fi-lee-ah’) – the love of friendship . . . ‘philadelphia’ or brotherly love. It’s the love of friends, the people you like and who like you. It’s two people walking side by side in trust. The kind of trust you have for a friend who has your back. Like the other two words, it, too, requires no commandment. This is about the people we like. Who needs a commandment about that?

And then, the Greeks have *agape* (‘a-ga-pay’) – the word from today’s Gospel Reading. This love is sacrificial . . . the laying down of one’s life for the welfare of another kind of love. Unconditional love. Love to the loveless and unloveable. The word used when the Bible speaks of God’s love. God is *agape*. God is love. The kind of love goes to the very essence of God. This love has its source in God Himself.

The Father loves the Son. The Father loves the world by sending the Son. The Son loves the world by laying down His life, by offering Himself, by giving Himself up for the sake of the world. This love is an act of will . . . an act of promise . . . a divine will to love that which is not loveable. And this is the only kind of love that must be commanded. There is no need to command storge, eros, or philia. They all happen. But not agape; it must be created and then called forth.

St. Paul wrote a description of agape in his first letter to the Corinthians. It is often read at weddings. That's fine, but the actual context is the Christian congregation. He says "agape is patient and kind. It is not jealous or boastful. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Agape bears all things, trusts all things, hopes all things, patiently endures all things."

Now, you probably will say to yourself, "I can't love that way" . . . and you're right. You can't. This is God's love – His love to you, and His love through you to others. You can't love this way. For only God loves in this way, but you get to be in that love, a recipient of that love. That's why Jesus begins not with a commandment to love but with His own love. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love," He says. The first thing is to be on the receiving end of Jesus' love. To abide in His love.

But how can you do that? How can you abide in His love? The answer: by keeping His commandments. But don't get the wrong idea here about this word 'commandments.' For the word Jesus uses is better translated by the word "mandate" or "teachings." In other words, "If you keep . . . cling to/ hold fast to . . . my teachings/my mandates, you will abide in my love." Which means what? Just this – 'as you live in your Baptism . . . hear My Word . . . eat and drink My Body and Blood . . . you will abide in My love for you.'

And this helps us understand how to abide in His love because these are His mandates. That's why they are so important. They are not commands that we must do in order to earn God's love, but as the means by which we receive and abide in His love.

And love is not an abstract verb. It is always concrete . . . an action verb. In love, Jesus lays down His life to save sinners. In love, He joins us to Himself in His death and resurrection in Holy Baptism. In love, He gives us His very Body and Blood in the Holy Supper to nurture and sustain our lives. In love, He forgives us, feeds us, clothes us, blesses us.

And we, in turn, abide in His love as we place ourselves into that love. Jesus' love never is forced on anyone. But be forewarned. After all, you can't claim to love Jesus yet hate His mandates. You can't claim to love Jesus yet despise His Baptism. You can't claim to love Jesus yet reject His forgiveness and your need for His forgiveness. You can't claim to love Jesus and stay away from His Supper. Think about it – I can claim to love my husband or wife, but if we're never at home together, never eat meals together, never talk to each other . . . you will rightly begin to question the love they have for one another, and so will he or she.

Agape is not an option. It goes with the flow. As Jesus again says: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

Notice – Jesus' love comes first. He loves you to death by His death on the cross. He lays down His life for you and calls you His 'friend.' Yes, what a friend we have in Jesus! But notice – you did not choose Him as a friend, even if it might

seem as if you did. You may have decided to follow Him, to commit your life to Him, to pray to Him, to obey Him . . . and well you should; but you did not choose Him. He chose you.

He chose you and appointed you to bear fruit – lasting, abiding fruit. Fruit that doesn't rot, fruit with no expiration date. And that fruit is, in one word, 'love.' Most of what we do every day is temporal and temporary. We build buildings that one day crumble. We bandage wounds on bodies that will one day die. Paint peels. Wood rots. Metal rusts. Weeds take over what once were lovely gardens. Most of what we have done in our lives will be forgotten, undone, lost completely.

But not agape, not love. Love never ceases because God never ceases to be. Prophecies pass away, tongues go quiet, knowledge evaporates. But love endures. Love abides. Love goes from death to life. Love survives the grave. Love never dies. Love never goes away for God is love.

“These things I command you, so that you may love one another.” Hear that sentence carefully. Jesus does not command His disciples to love one another. That was actually Moses who said, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Instead, Jesus commands His disciples to abide in His love . . . to cling to His mandates, in order that they might indeed love one another.

This is the uniqueness of Jesus and of faith in Him. He doesn't command us to do something, but to remain somewhere, to stick to His love for us, to be on the receiving end of His self-giving love. And the result of that . . . the fruit of that . . . will be the same 'Jesus-reflecting' love for one another.

Love, after all, is the fruit of faith, the result of faith. These two words are closely bound together, yet they are different. Faith is the relationship, love is the product of that relationship. Faith is trust – a passive abiding trust that clings to the promises of God in Christ . . . that clings to Jesus' mandates in Baptism, Word, and Supper . . . that clings to Jesus' death and resurrection . . . that holds fast to the forgiveness, life, and salvation that come from Jesus. Love then happens when faith happens.

And fruit is a great picture of all this . . . because fruit happens only when the conditions are right. Too cold, too warm, too wet, too dry . . . and fruit trees won't produce any fruit at all, and you will be hard-pressed to tell what kind of tree it even is. But when the conditions are right and the fruit begins to explode off the tree, then you won't even need to ask what kind of tree it is.

And that's agape love – the Christian life. And when the fruit of agape love appears hanging on your branches, you are seen for who you really are . . . a disciple of Jesus . . . one who abides in His love . . . one who has been chosen in His love to love others . . . a friend of Jesus . . . and who in His sight is the apple of His eye. Amen.