

If you love me, you will keep my commandments

This simple command from Jesus Christ is how we live our faith

We are not angels

We are not pure spirits

We are body and soul

So we need to respond to God's love in word and deed

We express our love in faith

And we live it by keeping the commandments

Despite the trials, the hardships, the disappointments

The early Apostles knew this

Our first reading continued the reading from last week

The Apostles named new deacons to serve the community

After some time, there were persecutions

One of the deacons, Stephen, was martyred

With Saul consenting to his death

Then a greater persecution began

The Temple itself was destroyed

But rather than smothering out this new faith

The persecution ended up spreading it

The disciples were forced out of Jerusalem

To all corners of the known world

So today we find Phillip, another of the deacons, in the city of Samaria

Probably the capital city

He was in the midst of a pagan land

Proclaiming Christ to them

The very thing that caused the persecution in Jerusalem

The disciples continue to do wherever they end up

They had the power of the Holy Spirit

And they were courageous in proclaiming the Gospel

The people heard him

Saw the signs and healings he performed

And they came to believe in Christ

When the Apostles heard about what was happening in Samaria

Peter and John went down

When they confirmed these were true believers

They laid hands on them so they could receive the Holy Spirit

What we call confirmation developed from this

This is also the pattern Christ gives us

When he was baptized by John

It was a baptism of water

Then the Holy Spirit descended upon him

Two separate actions

After his resurrection, he appeared to the Apostles in the upper room

He breathed on them

'Receive the Holy Spirit'

Then, after his Ascension, the feast of Pentecost

When the Holy Spirit descends in tongues of fire

A more complete reception of the Holy Spirit

Again, this two-step process

It is through this process that Christ continues to remain in us

Because Jesus is living his life in us

Peter tells us: *We should always be ready to give an explanation*

To anyone who asks for a reason for your hope

The reason is simple

It is about more than a way of life

It is more than following a code of conduct

The reason is a person

The reason for our hope is the risen Christ

Christ has a great love for sinners

So much he wants to live in us

And lead us from being sinners to being saints

Christ was put to death in the flesh

He was brought to life in the Spirit

This is the Spirit that gives life to our lives

So we can take Him into the world

So just as Christ was willing to suffer for doing good in this life

He continues to do this through us today

Before these things happened

Christ told his Apostles another would come

One he called the Advocate

A lawyer

The term can mean both a defender and a prosecutor

It speaks of how he does his job

He aggressively goes after his objective

Christ not only came to reveal how to live a fully human life

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit

He makes it possible for his life to continue in us

Realizing that I am in my Father, You are in me and I in you

This is more than a path to follow

It is more than an ethical system

It is an intimate relationship with one who loves us

It is a relationship that is lived

Whoever has my commandments and observes them in the one who loves me

And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father

And I will love him and reveal myself to him

The proof of our love is not in the words we say alone

It is in the words we say

And the choices we make

St. Paul tells us to pray always

St Augustine puts it a bit differently

He tells us to praise God always

We come to Mass to praise God

Much of what we do here is offering words of praise and thanksgiving

But first, we have to make the effort to come

Putting other things aside for an hour every weekend is praising God

Then while we are here, we are encouraging each other

Simply by our presence

It means something when the church is filled

To God, it is a matter of consequence if we are her or not

But what happens to our praise as we go from here?

It may seem as if our praise has come to an end

But St Augustine continues:

As long as we are living good lives

We continue to praise God

We cease to praise God only when we swerve from justice

From what is pleasing to God

He says your tongue may be silent

But your actions will cry aloud

For as our ears hear voices

God perceives intentions of the heart

His ears hear our thoughts

This also is what is behind the final blessing at our Mass

When we say Go in Peace

Or Go forth, the Mass is ended

The Latin term is *'Ite, Missa est'*

The correct translation, as I have mentioned is: *Go, the Mass is*

This particular Mass here ends

But the Mass itself

The Mass, where we come to praise and give thanks, never ends

We continue to live it in our lives

Or better, Christ continues to live in our lives

Through our thought, words and deeds

And in His Spirit we have the strength and courage

To endure any trials or hardships

Disappointments or persecutions that may come our way

To praise God by loving and living His commandments

To proclaim Christ to the world

And to build his kingdom in this world

Living stone by living stone

Until He returns in all His Glory for all eternity