

6th Sunday of Easter (B)  
(1John 4:7-10/ John 15:9-17)  
06.05.2018  
Love & Life

A few years ago, a group of young school children came to the Monastery. I asked them: "According to you, what is the most important thing in life?" While many among them mentioned parents and friends, one of the girls answered: "Life itself". It was a very good answer.

For you and me, life is the most precious gift we have ever received. While we become partly responsible for what we do with it, we must acknowledge that life's beginning and end, and many things in-between are beyond our control. Life is quite a frustrating reality, so precious and yet so elusive.

In fact, in his Gospel and letters, St John shares with us the secret of life: where it begins and where it ends and how to remain alive in-between. The secret is summed up in one simple and yet powerful word: love. Life is about love, to love is to be alive. We heard John declare: "God's love for us was revealed (...) so that we could have life". Earlier in the same letter, John reminds us that love is the sure sign that we are alive: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death" (1Jn 3:14). To refuse to love is to die.

Our faith tells us that love is the ultimate criterion of our parentage to God: if we love we are born from God and will live in God, before and beyond death; if we love, we are truly brothers and sisters of Christ.

St Coloman uses a very vivid image when he reminds us that "the love of God is the restoration of His image" in us (*Serm. XI*). When we love, our lives are shaped and transformed in such a way that they reflect God more and more, that his image and likeness become visible in us.

Obviously here we are not talking of feelings. The love we live by cannot be reduced to the depth of sentiment that connects us to some people who are particularly dear to us. We are dealing with the orientation of our lives, with the compass which helps us to remain faithful to what is at the core of our being as Christians.

When he decided to join the monastic community at Bec in 1042, St Anselm declared: "There I shall have my rest, there God will be to me all in all, there his love will be the only subject of my contemplation" (Eadmer, *Life...* V, p. 9-10).

What about us today, in our daily lives, what is the only subject of our contemplation? Have we made of love the guiding and leading thread of our choices and decisions?

In her novel *Middlemarch*, George Eliot describes one of her characters with the following words: "Mary had already come to take life very much as a comedy in which she had a proud, nay, a generous resolution not to act the mean or treacherous part" (p. 269). What part have we decided to play in life? I do not know whether life is a comedy or not, but what is sure is that we often turn it into a tragedy when we decide to play a mean and treacherous part in it.

Love is the only script which can prevent life from becoming a tragedy. At a personal level, and at the level of our countries, we can allow fears and self-centredness, anger and greed to play the main part and thus prevent us from being alive and life-giving.

In his last Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis quotes the late Vietnamese cardinal Nguyễn Văn Thuận who was imprisoned for his faith. In his autobiography, the Cardinal tells us that, while in prison, “he chose ‘to live the present moment, filling it to the brim with love’” (*Gaudete...* n. 17). In order to live, he chose to love.

What do we choose?

There are daily opportunities for us to choose love and so to live fully as human beings: when we take the time to listen to somebody, when we show kindness and respect, when we speak words of healing and encouragement, when we decide to forgive. These are not necessarily great acts which are publicised all over the planet, it begins small and with the people around us, those we meet every day.

The challenge is that they cannot be one-off decisions and actions. In our Gospel reading, when Jesus says: “Remain in my love”, he means that we are called to persevere in love. Over and over again we have to choose love so that our whole lives may be informed and guided by God’s love. The restoration of God’s image in us is a long and ongoing process which requires patience, perseverance and humility.

Our growth in God, our growth in love, is not only the result of the love we show to others. It is also, at the same time, the work of the love we receive from others. Here pride and self-sufficiency, past wounds and fears are real stumbling blocks which can – and often do – hinder love from accomplishing its work in us.

Every situation of human distress, of emotional, financial or spiritual poverty, of hopelessness and despair spurs us on to choose between being robbed of our humanity by closing our hearts or becoming fully alive by loving generously.

It is never too late to make the right decision.

During this Easter season, let us rediscover the joy of playing the part of love in the great story of human life. Let us allow God’s love to restore his image in us and around us.