

6th Sunday of Easter, C

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's gospel, Jesus says to his disciples: **“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.”**

We are so used to those words that we forget how beautiful they are. And it is Jesus at the Last Supper talking to his disciples.

And what does Jesus mean when he says: **“Whoever loves me will keep my word?”** Keeps what word?

The only command that Jesus ever gave his disciples is this: **“Love one another as I have loved you.”**

Not love him or the Father, but **“Love one another.”** Be generous and kind, loyal and trustworthy, but most of all, forgive each other. This is all that God wants of you.

The true mark of a disciple of Jesus is his willingness to forgive. Jesus says: **“By this will all men know you are my disciples, because you love one another, loving with God's love, and God's love is for always a forgiving love, and God's love is a giving love, and what God gives, he never takes away.”**

I am sure you will all say, **“Yes, fine words as we sit here in this church, safe, sound, and comfortable. But as for the world outside, the wicked world is different, full of evil and great dangers. Best to be avoided at all costs.”**

One important thing to remember when we say things like that is this: the world outside is God's world, and he tells us, **“Do not be afraid, I have overcome the world that you fear. And together we shall change the world.”** In fact, it is changing before your eyes, for Jesus is among us and changing it.

And now I shall tell you an old story, which you have probably heard before, but it bears retelling to us disciples of Jesus who are sent into the whole world, sent by Jesus himself, especially to those people who need God's forgiveness and need God's love.

That world can be very empty, but we are to fill it with an understanding that God is there and with them.

After all, giving the gift of God's love and teaching others how to love as God loves is the reason Jesus came to dwell among us and made his home with us in the first place.

Once, an old Rabbi lived on the edge of a dark and gloomy forest. The forest may have been dark and gloomy, but it was also known far and wide as a sacred forest. And in the sacred forest, there was a sacred tree. And beneath the sacred tree were written the sacred words in a sacred language that only the Rabbi could read.

And whenever his flock was in grave danger, the people would go to the Rabbi, who would go to the sacred forest, find the sacred tree, and read the sacred words. A miracle would happen, and the people in the village would all be saved.

When the old Rabbi died, a new Rabbi took his place. He had heard the story of the sacred forest, the sacred tree, and the sacred words, so when the people came to warn him of a great danger, the Rabbi went with them to the sacred forest, and they found the sacred tree.

Unfortunately, the Rabbi had forgotten how to read the words, so he made up his own. And guess what? The miracle happened anyway, and the people were saved.

A long time passed, and a third Rabbi was appointed. However, he lived in a city far away, and though he knew the story about the sacred forest, the sacred tree, and the sacred words, he thought it was all only a story.

But when the village people went up to the city to seek out the new Rabbi, to save them from a great danger, he gathered them together in the city square. He prayed: **“O Lord of Heaven, we know there was a sacred forest, and there was a sacred tree, and there were sacred words to be said, but they are lost and gone and almost all forgotten. However, in their memory, we beg you to save us from the great danger.”**

And guess what, the miracle happened again, and the people were saved.

The lesson? Many, but one explanation might be: God is with us all, and always with us: in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, in

joy and in sorrow, in mourning and in celebration... He loves us, we are all his children, and his love and our destiny are everlasting.

And the people rejoiced and praised the Lord of Heaven for his wisdom, kindness, and love.

Today, we add to that joy the joy of Jesus telling us it is all about love: God loving us, and we loving one another as Jesus loves us.

And not to forget the end of today's Gospel, which is the end of our homily, and that is when Jesus himself speaks to us again. The first part was love; the second part is peace. And he says to all of us here today: **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.”**

And we might well add: **“Jesus, take pity on our troubled and fearful hearts, and grant to us the peace and unity and love of your kingdom where you live with us now and forever and ever.”** Amen.