

6th Easter- A 2014
Deacon Pat Hall

ACTS 8:5-8, 14-17; 1 PETER 3:15-18; JOHN 14:15-21

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/052514.cfm>

*I give you a new commandment: love one another.
As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.
This is how all will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13: 34-35)*

This is the commandment Jesus instituted at the foot washing of his disciples on Holy Thursday, the Last Supper, the beginning of the Triduum of his passion, death and resurrection.

The Gospel of John continues in our Gospel reading proclaimed today. It starts:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And ends with:

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

These mirror statements form what Biblical literary criticism calls an *inclusio*.

These are statements that are bookends around a central message.

Jesus isn't just establishing rules of behavior with a promised reward as if you do this, then Jesus does that.

Jesus is showing the way that if we enter his love, we will see with eyes that the world does not have.

We will be open to his continuing presence in the Spirit, another advocate, just as Jesus had been our advocate in the flesh.

It is through the Spirit of truth, that the Revealer of truth, Jesus, continues to be present in our lives.ⁱ

To live in Jesus' holy presence is to live in Trinitarian love.

This is living in the very life of God, today.

This is an invitation to live in the Divine Life that comes to fulfillment in the awaited second coming of Christ.

Yet we are sensual creatures.
It is through our physical senses that we are led to the spiritual.
We need God in the flesh to lead us to come and share in his divinity.

And yet, our reliance on our physical senses can obscure the truth we were called to embrace as spiritual creatures.
It is for this reason that the Jesus had to leave us, so that he could continue to be present to us in a truer, more complete way.

I had an experience of being led by my physical senses, only to be called to go beyond them.
It involved my grandfather, my dad's dad.

I had never gotten to know my grampa.
He died when I was 5 of silicosis, a lung disease that was a result of being a copper miner in the Upper Peninsula.
All I remember of my grampa was an image of his back as he laid ill on his day-bed when I would visit my grandma.

I only know his face because of pictures we have.
I only know him through stories my dad shares.
My dad helped grampa start a chicken farm after the depression closed the mines.
My dad had six sisters, so you can imagine how close those two guys became.

I remember a conversation I had with my Aunt Grace.
I told her that I thought my dad was the sweetest man I had ever known.

Now my Aunt Grace was my dad's baby sister and I knew she worshipped the ground he walked on.
In fact, she had sent her fiancé to my dad to ask for permission to marry her.
But in our conversation, Aunt Grace looked at me square in the eye and said that **her** dad was the sweetest man she had ever met.

That's how I knew my grampa.

My grampa was buried in a cemetery on the SE side of Jackson.
My grandma joined him decades later.
I had never been to their graves despite having driven by Jackson hundreds of times.

One day, just a few years ago, I was approaching Jackson on I-94. I was by myself, no kids and no appointment waiting for me on my return to Kalamazoo, so I thought I would look for the cemetery and my grandparents' plots.

I stopped off at a local gas station to get directions and bought one of those disposable cameras to commemorate the visit. Well I found the spot and spent some time paying my respects. I expected to take a few shots, spend a few moments and then move on.

It was pretty easy reminiscing with memories of my grandma. We were pretty close. She used to call me "guy" in that British accent of hers.

But, when I started to pay my respects to my grampa, I didn't have memories to attach to him. I just sat there in the grass at the foot of his grave. What was supposed to be just minutes turned into over an hour. Absent the physical memories, I just sat in the present. Over time, I came to be flooded with a peace, a love and a consolation that brought tears to my eyes and sobs to my throat.

I ascribe the experience to the Spirit of truth. Being led by the physical and now in the absence of the physical, I was open to see and experience something beyond.

I am not claiming an apparition of my dead grandfather. But the love experienced was an embracing love. Confident that my grandfather is alive in Christ, I began to have a relationship with my grampa that I never had when he was alive on earth. Today, I add my grandfather to the list of intercessory saints to whom I pray daily.

I know what it is like to be a grandfather on earth. But it is consoling to know that I have the sweetest man anybody has ever met as my grandfather watching over me and my family from the very heart of God.

You can imagine my gratitude for the work of the Spirit of truth who makes Jesus present in our lives.

It is His presence that moves us to act as Jesus for those around us, for those in need, for those who require our love and consolation, and for those who need us to help celebrate their joys.

In our Letter from Peter today, we are given a way how:

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.

Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.

I had some training at Evangelical Catholic in Madison, WI where Bishop Morlino, formerly of our diocese, is the Ordinary. One of the exercises they taught was to have a 4-minute speech ready should at any time in our lives we are asked why we are Christian. Sometimes we are granted only a small window of opportunity to evangelize.

Now I have been a Christian since as far back as I can remember.

I went through Sunday School, catechism, college theology and diaconal study.

Yet, was I prepared to give a 4-minute explanation of my relationship with my savior?

It has to be limited to 4 minutes because most people don't want to hear any more than that.

I had to work at it.

So, I leave you with a homework assignment.

As you follow the Lord's commandment to love,
as you follow Peter's exhortation to give an explanation to anyone for a reason for your hope,

I ask that you sit quietly with the Lord and allow him to make himself present to you in a way beyond your senses.

Allow the Spirit of truth to inform you as to how you can share Christ's love.

ⁱ John Shea, *On Earth As It Is In Heaven*, p. 186