

## Easter 5

I take as my text today, from St. John's Gospel:

*....for the Father himself loveth you,  
because ye have loved me, and have  
believed that I came out from God.*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be  
always acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my  
Redeemer.*

Strictly speaking, in the Church Calendar, today is the Fifth Sunday after Easter but in our Anglican Tradition it is also called **Rogation Sunday**, one of those seasons of the **Church** that leaves some of us, more especially anyone not familiar with Anglican Traditions, wondering as to its significance.

While many of us Anglicans have a tie with the Mother Country, still, many more here in this country and throughout the world, do have share that same tie which binds us to the many Church Traditions that have their origin in the *English Church* or have been preserved through that *English Heritage*.

**Rogation Sunday** is just such one of those traditions recalling the elaborate processions occurring on this day, processions that, while a rarity in these times, were in years past very important in the life of the parish. Indeed, it was during the processions around the bounds of the parish that the fields were blessed and prayers offered for a successful crop.

Contrary to our English origins, the bounds of a parish church today are so disconnected from the land that surrounds it. Even rural or country churches are not contiguous with the farm lands even though they may be surrounded by fields, pastures, and forests. Then, there is our Parish which is certainly not inclusive of fields that produce crops, and a procession that would include farm land would be of such magnitude that it would be not only unlikely but also unfeasible.

Still today, some parishes here as well as in the UK still have a Rogation Day procession, however limited to processing around the church itself sometimes including its immediate grounds.

Our disconnect with past traditions or practices of the Church extends far beyond what we inherited from the Mother Country, but is also found with the **Church** in general, a disconnect that tends to separate the **Church** into the *Apostolic* and *Post Apostolic Ages*.

By that, there is tendency to view the **Church** in the *Apostolic Age*, that is in the first century, as if it existed apart from the **Church** in the centuries that followed, or the *Post Apostolic Age*.

We cannot divide the Church into what is essentially two Churches —the *Apostolic Church* and the *Modern Church*, because, indeed, there is only *one Church* — *One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church*.

Moreover, it was at the turn of the first century that we see the **Church** coming into its own.

We may well say that the last of the original **Apostles** helped make the transition into the second century. That **Apostle** would be, of course, John, who lived into the Second Century, dying at Ephesus around the year 105. Especially significant is that he had just completed his Gospel a few years before his death.

But it was not just John alone, though he was the last of the **Apostles**, there were notable Saints and early theologians of the **Church**, who spanned the turn of the century, owing their discipleship to John, most notably St. Polycarp, one of my favorites, the bishop of Smyrna who was martyred in the year 155; and there was St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, martyred in 107.

The foundations of the Church were well established by the end of the first century; it had become an organized institution with forms of worship, officers and leaders, and the order of clergy. It was collecting, organizing, and preserving written documents, especially the letters of Paul, Peter, James, and John, as well as the writings of others, such as Saints Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement the 1st, and the documents that were to become known as the synoptic Gospels, those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Without a doubt, many documents produced in the early days of the Church were lost, most certainly many of the documents from Church leaders communicating amongst themselves and with other churches. Evidence of that is quite clear in what has survived; yet those that were essential and basic to its foundation did survive.

In more recent times, many documents have come to light that have caught the attention of scholars. Yet, we must bear in mind that quite a number of documents were rejected for various reasons by the **Church** in the fourth century as it sought to bring together and give the Church's stamp of approval to a **New Testament**, or in official terminology, *Canonized*. This took place in the late 300's and along the way many documents, questionable as to their authenticity, were rejected.

As the first century comes to a close and the second century begins, we find the Church thriving and we see St. John writing his Gospel; most likely dictating his Gospel, as he was quite old and frail, supposed to be in his mid to late nineties.

As we know, John outlived them all, enduring hardships, torture, deprivation; yet rebounding stronger with each encounter, his faith secure, abounding, and one of his greatest strengths was *love*.

That was the mark of John; indeed, his legacy might be said to be two-fold: that of *theologian*, and that of *love*.

So, it is no surprise that in today's passage from St. John's Gospel, we discover something basic and fundamental to our relationship with God: because God loves us, we can approach him directly.

That is very powerful — because God loves us, we can approach him directly.

God is about **love**; the **New Testament** is the story of God fulfilling his **love** for us.

Jesus demonstrates this **love**: first by taking on our flesh, second by dying for us, and third by loving and trusting his disciples to carry on in his Name.

He tells his disciples, *for the Father loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.*

Oftentimes, we think of God as being an angry God, as the *God of Wrath* depicted in the **Old Testament**. Then, along comes Jesus and he turns God's **wrath** into **love**.

But if we listen carefully, we find that Jesus is telling us that God has always loved us, always loved us, and it was because of this **love** for us that he sent his Son into the world.

Jesus did not change God into **love**; rather, he brought to us God's **love** so that we may know, understand, and experience it. Jesus, the express Image of God's **Love** made it manifest to us.

In this context, we may look at the **Old Testament** as the story of a loving father preparing his children for something very wonderful that was to come, while the **New Testament** is the story of God fulfilling his **love** for us in a **New Covenant**.

Perhaps, even more revealing of God's **love** is the trust that Jesus places in his disciples. He tells them, *Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that you will be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone...*

Knowing what will happen when he is taken into custody, how they will scatter leaving him alone, Jesus, nevertheless, loves them and retains complete confidence and trust in his disciples that they will, in the end, choose to be his instruments of peace and love in the world.

They will choose, the choice not being forced upon them but that they will truly choose him, Jesus, as the long awaited Messiah, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world — a choice that is based upon **love**.

It is a **love** and a trust that overcomes the darkest of moments, the direst of times: it is this kind of **love** that Jesus brings to us from God: the ever-present **love** of God that is in and through us. Just as he, though abandoned by his disciples, was not alone, so we, who live in the **love** of God, are never alone.

We are never alone: that is a certainty of God's **love**. We who are members of the *Family of Christ* are never alone, never without God's **love**, and sustained always by his Grace.

Moreover, just as he had a plan for each of Jesus' disciples, God has a plan for each of us: a calling in life that is revealed through prayer and meditation. For this end, he has endowed us with talents and abilities and expectations.

God is our heavenly Father who, when we fall short, is there to pick us up. When we face the darkest of times, he is there through the **Holy Spirit** to strengthen and comfort us. When we feel abandoned and alone, he is there through our Lord and Saviour to lift up our spirits and refresh us with his **Body** and **Blood**.

God is always there because he loves us and trusts us to love him and to strive to do his will.

In the *Comfortable Words* leading up to the *Prayer of Consecration*, we are ever reminded that: God so loved his **Creation**, and us, the pinnacle of that **Creation**, loved us so much that he sent his only begotten Son into the world to bring us tangible evidence of that **love**.

And he tells us through his Son, our Lord and Saviour, that, whenever we are burdened with the labors and trials of this world, he tells us to come to him and he will refresh us.

Even though we are sinners, through Jesus Christ we can attain to everlasting life.

If we set aside all the deep theological considerations, what John reveals to us simply in his Gospel is the complete **love** of God for us and that we are his children.

John, the Beloved Disciple, in his dying words, gave us his charge: *Little children, love one another.*

When asked if that was all he had to say, he replied, *It is enough, for it is the Lord's command.*

Indeed, it is, and it is with **love** that we who serve, as priests, as ministers of God, humbly, in the spirit of St. John's words, commend you to do likewise as little children, to love one another.

*It is enough, for it is the Lord's command.*