

Love runs, flies, and rejoices!

Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 5, 2024. Jn 15:9-17
Ave Maria Catholic Church – Fr. David M Vidal

Blessed John Paul I died just a few months after his election as Pope. However, he left us beautiful reflections. In one of his homilies, he mentions a prayer that he learned when he was a child:

"My God, with all my heart above all things, I love You, infinite good and our eternal happiness, and, for your sake, I love my neighbor as myself and forgive offenses received. Oh Lord, may I love you more and more". [And he explains] This is a very well-known prayer, embellished with biblical phrases. My mother taught it to me. I recite it several times a day even now."

According to this prayer, the act of loving is not static, it is not still! It is a movement towards the lover: God first, then our neighbor. And it is an act that can increase more and more! According to this prayer, to love means traveling, rushing with one's heart towards the object loved, always with greater intensity.

The author of the *Imitation of Christ* says: he who loves *runs, flies, and rejoices* (*currit, volat, laetatur*, bk. III, c. V, n. 4).

This is the journey of our hearts.

It is a mysterious journey.

We cannot start this journey unless God takes the initiative. Jesus tells us that *"No one can come to Him unless we are drawn by the Father who sent Him"* (Jn 6:44). God draws us first because He loves us. We know He loves us because He created us, keeps us in existence, sent His Son for our salvation, and wants our happiness.

And God draws us in a mysterious way. Saint Augustine explains that God loves us *"not only in a way that we ourselves want but even in such a way that we enjoy being drawn"* (St Augustine, In Io. Evang. Tr. 26, 4).

However, this mysterious journey of the heart includes sacrifices.

Our hearts must travel the path of this world, and our journey through this world brings sacrifices. We know there are uneven paths. We know that we will suffer heavy rains, scorching sun, and encounters with wild animals, but those challenges must not stop us.

In this journey, we are not alone! Out of love for us, the Father sent Jesus to us, to be our companion and guide. He knows the way to the Father because He was sent by the Father. He knows the way to heaven because He came down from heaven. There is no better guide than Jesus because He not only knows the way, but He is the way! Then, to show us that sacrifices are part of this journey, He carries the cross for us and invites us to share His journey by carrying our daily crosses during this walk with Him.

Today's gospel speaks about love. This is the love of Jesus because Jesus will say: "Love one another as I love you." The love of Jesus lasts forever. This is a love that endures everything, a love that gives without counting the cost, a love that is ready to face sacrifices, even the ultimate sacrifice, "because there is no greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Jesus also tells us that this is his commandment: "This is my commandment, that you love one another" (Jn 15,12).

Why did Jesus Christ call this his commandment?

1. Jesus calls this his commandment because Jesus himself is love. He came from heaven specifically to bring us the love of the Father, a Father who so loved the world that sent his Only Son to save us from sin and death. And there is no salvation without love. To be saved, we must love God with our whole heart, mind, and soul (this is the first commandment) and we must love one another as He loved us (this is a second commandment that derives from the first).

2. Jesus calls this his commandment because love is the foundation of our good actions. We show respect and kindness, assist others by doing good to others, and avoid evil simply because we love. That is what St. Augustine teaches when he says, "Love, and then do whatever you want."

With these words, Saint Augustine is not justifying evil actions. Saint Augustine is not saying: Do whatever you want, even unworthy things, and say that you did them out of love and that will make them good! No, he is saying the opposite. He teaches that if we truly love, goodness will follow.

3. Finally, Jesus calls this his commandment because love is the sign of the disciples of Jesus. We read in John 13: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another," (Jn 13,35). We are the disciples of Jesus, not because we pronounce his name with our lips, not because we wear a sign that says: "I love Jesus." We are Jesus' disciples because we love as Jesus loves, and we try to imitate Jesus as much as possible.

How does love work in our lives?

Love gives spiritual joy. Joy is God's gift. If we look for joy without God, by putting God aside, we only experience frustration, emptiness, and sadness. Without love, there is no joy. Without love, everything is pain. Without love, work is unbearable. Then, if we are wondering how to be happier, the answer is not so difficult: " Love as Jesus loves."

Love brings peace. Peace is the tranquility of order and the harmony of our desires. On the contrary, hatred is the first sin against love. Hatred is a restless movement of self-destruction. Hatred finds no rest, however, love rests in God. Ultimately, this is what our hearts desire because, as Saint Augustine teaches us in the Book of Confessions: "*God has made us for himself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in God.*"

Love brings mercy. In the Our Father prayer, when we pray "*Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,*" we are saying: "God loves us, as we love our neighbor." This is a very demanding prayer. Love inclines us to have compassion for the miseries of our neighbor, considering those miseries as if they were our own.

We must love, not just a little, but we must love God with our whole heart, mind, and soul, and we must love our neighbor as Jesus taught us, following Jesus' example. Then, we must not stop at the point at which we have arrived, but with God's help, we must progress in love.

We should make the prayer of John Paul I our own prayer: "*My God, with all my heart above all things I love You, infinite good and our eternal happiness, and, for your sake, I love my neighbor as myself and forgive offenses received. Oh Lord, may I love you more and more.*" Amen