

Homily for the 5th Sunday of Easter

One of the sayings I remember my father using when I was growing up was 'actions speak louder than words'. Most of us will probably not only agree with this but will have actually experienced the truth of the statement. When we examine it a little more closely we realise that some actions, which speak louder than words, are for good and some not so good. For example, again referring to the current pandemic, we can think, as we did last week, of those key workers, who put their own lives on the line in order to help save the lives of others. Their actions went far beyond any words they could have spoken. On the other hand there are plenty of actions which devastate the lives of the innocent, when individuals or regimes use their power to oppress people, leave them in poverty, deny their human rights, even unjustly take their lives. With this in mind wouldn't it be better to adopt a phrase we heard in the second reading, 'our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active.' If we are acting out of love, all our actions will be for good.

Again, applying this to the verse in the psalm – the poor shall eat and have their fill – we might think of the restaurants who, despite being closed during lockdown, provided free meals for NHS staff and others. We see the plight of people in India and encourage individuals and Governments, our own included, to supply both vaccines and equipment as generously as possible, moving from vocal support to doing something real and active. When our love is real and active we are willing to do without ourselves in order to share what we have. This may be giving money, donating clothes, inviting an elderly relative or someone no longer capable of looking after themselves, into our homes, volunteering to staff a food bank or a night shelter, lobbying our MPs about an issue in which we deeply believe.

It is not always easy to put words into actions, but one person who certainly did was Saul, despite opposition from within who doubted that his conversion was real. He spent the rest of his life proclaiming the Gospel without thought for his own safety, but fearlessly and with great effect. His life had been transformed by his meeting with Christ on the road to Damascus. He made his home in Christ who had made his home in Saul. He bore fruit because he was attached to Christ, as a branch is attached to a tree.

The image of the vine, or indeed any tree, is a powerful one, drawing life through its roots and trunk and into the branches and leaves. If a branch is cut off from the tree it cannot bear fruit as we know, rather it rots. Jesus invites us to reflect on this image as our own relationship with him, warning us that cut off from him we can do nothing. However, when we make our home in him and he makes his home in us, then we draw our life from him, encouraging us to move from words to actions, or as St John puts it, enabling us to bear fruit by making sure that 'our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active.'

Bidding Prayers for 5th Sunday of Easter

Celebrant:

As we draw life from Jesus, the true vine, we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

For all who are grafted on to Christ through the sacrament of Baptism – that they will draw life from him and bear fruit in plenty.

Lord in your mercy

For those leaders and regimes who have gone astray from the Gospel message of justice and peace – that they may have a change of heart so that the plight of their people may be transformed.

Lord in your mercy

For those suffering in body, mind or spirit, those who are incurably sick, those coming to the end of their life, those suffering from dementia or related conditions – that they will receive the love, care and support they and their families need at this time.

Lord in your mercy

For ourselves – that our love will not be just words or mere talk, but something alive and active.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster or the Covid-19 pandemic, and Katherine Smith who died last Wednesday, Gerald Johnson, Ellen Murphy, France Thompson and Florence McDermott whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

All loving God, your Son Jesus is the living vine and we are the branches. Help us to remain in him, and he in us. Prune from our hearts those things which prevent us from following him in freedom. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen