

The Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Perhaps a better title would be 'The Triumph of the Crucified', for his was a triumph of love over the betrayal and rejection that culminated in the cross. In the garden of Gethsemani Jesus committed himself to continue carrying out the mission given him by God. Faced with what must have looked like failure, he resolved to continue, come what may, to proclaim the truth that God is love: to continue to eat with sinners and to draw people into God's embrace, even if, to do so, he had to break across the religious expectations of his contemporaries. He said once that his mission was to set us free to live to the full (John 10:10). He was not going to let the threat of death deter him from that: 'Father, not my will but yours be done'(Matthew 26:39). The obstinacy of the civil and religious leaders, and the fickleness of the crowd, saw him condemned to death.

Jesus knew that love in the real world must include forgiveness, for we are not innocent. From the cross we hear him pray: 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do'(Luke 23:34). This forgiveness was for his own followers as well. Three times he asked Peter 'Do you love me?'(John 21:17), in this way giving him the opportunity to declare his love. Jesus' forgiveness was needed by Peter. It was important, too, to Jesus, for it freed Peter up to carry on Jesus' mission of love: 'Feed my sheep'.

Jesus confided the leadership of the church to a forgiven sinner. It is ever thus. Jesus promised he would be present among his followers till the end of time. He is still eating with sinners as we gather here at the Eucharist. The sinfulness of the Church is more than the sum total of the, as it were, private faults and failings, even crimes, of her members. Our personal sins affect the institution itself. Because we love the church, because we know the church to be the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, we are tempted to defend the church, when we should be naming the ways in which we and the church has sinned, acknowledging the sin and seeking forgiveness from those we have hurt. It is the message we are to defend, not the messenger.

While continuing to seek forgiveness we must find the courage to carry on the church's mission. Repentant, and more humble, we are to remember that in and through the sinful members of a sinful church the risen Christ continues to reach out in compassionate love to all, especially to the poor and the rejected. We need to name and acknowledge our sin, and seek forgiveness from those we have hurt. The strength to do this comes, as it came to Peter, from the continued love of the risen Christ. This love is assured, not only because we need it, but in order that the church will continue to reveal God as love and continue the mission of Jesus to embrace the world that God so loves (see John 3:16).

Jesus' way of dying, and God's taking him into his embrace in the resurrection, are at the centre of the Christian faith, revealing as they do God's love-response to human disobedience. Our disobedience matters. It matters that we sin, and that our sin has such terrible effects on ourselves and on other people. God cannot pretend that things are other than as they really are. Sin, however, cannot change the truth that God is love. This love, demonstrated in the way Jesus died, is the source of all our hope. If we believe it, we may dare the journey out of sin. If enough people believe it, there is still hope (a hope we renew each time we pray the 'Our Father') of

realising Jesus' dream of God's will being done on earth as in heaven.

Herein lies 'the Triumph of the Crucified One'. It is a triumph of love. Let us take the occasion of this feast to commit ourselves to allow his love to purify our hearts. It is not ourselves that we preach. It is God's love as seen in the heart of Jesus. Paul believed that his weaknesses were his strength. It could be the same for the church. Please God, one day we will be able to say with Saint Paul: 'I live, no longer I. It is Christ who lives in me. The life I now live I live through the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me'(Galatians 2:20).

In the meantime, as we grow, let us learn from Jesus how to carry our cross, in prayer, in faith, in hope and in love; in courage as we commit ourselves each day to carry out the mission of love entrusted to us. Jesus triumphed because his faith in God was not destroyed by the pain, the degradation and the humiliation of the cross. Recognising God as love, let us allow God's graceful Spirit to create in us, as it did in Jesus, a people that dares all for love. His love was pure. Our love can be purified. On this feast of the Triumph of the Crucified let us 'look upon the one we have pierced'(John 19:37). As we continue to seek forgiveness from those we have hurt, let us believe in God's offer of grace to purify our hearts. Let us re-commit ourselves, personally and as a church, to love.