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Homily at Mass 6th Sunday of Easter, Year C – 26 May 2019

The Gospel today brings us to the Upper Room in Jerusalem where Jesus has celebrated the Passover Meal with his Apostles. It is Holy Thursday night. Like a slave Jesus has knelt down before each of his Apostles and washed their feet. At the table he has taken bread and a cup of wine in his hands and instituted the gift of the Eucharist: “This is my Body. This is the Chalice of my Blood”. His heart is set on all that he will do for us – all his suffering, his rejection, his cross, his death. Last Sunday he bid us: “Love one another”. Today he promises us the Holy Spirit. Let’s recall some phrases from Jesus as he opens his heart to us today.

“Keep my word”

“The Holy Spirit will teach you everything”

“Peace I bequeath to you”

“Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid”

These words of Jesus give us deep felt consolation. Jesus reassures us of his friendship and unfailing love. These are not the words of a distant or unfeeling deity. These are the words of our Lord and God who also says to us “I do not call you servants ... I call you friends”. It is Jesus, the best of friends, who lavishes on us, his friends, many gifts – his holy Word, his Eucharist, his Holy Spirit, his Peace.

“**Keep my word**” Jesus says. It sounds like keep your promise”. Remain faithful to the Promises of Baptism and the Profession of Faith we make at Mass Sunday by Sunday. God is never silent – he keeps his promises especially the great promise of Jesus “know that I am with you always.” You and I keep our promise by our faithful participation at Sunday Mass. Here at Mass God gathers his family, his friends, his Holy People. Here at Mass God speaks in his Holy Word proclaimed: it shapes our hearts, enlightens our minds, calling us to life joy, freedom, generous charity, to be Christ’s witnesses. “Keep my Word”. “Listen to my Word.” “Let this Word find a home in you”.

“**The Holy Spirit will teach you everything**”. Who is the Holy Spirit? We easily depict him as a Dove who settled on Jesus at his Baptism, and the fire and wind of Pentecost. The Church relies on the Holy Spirit to animate and bring to life all her ministry, her sacraments, the holiness of the saints, the heroism of the martyrs, the joy of the Gospel. Every Christian relies on the Holy Spirit to sustain our faith, to inspire our daily prayers, to teach our children, to witness to Christ. Without the Holy Spirit, Christian life would run on empty. Without the Holy Spirit, the Church would just be a human organisation, just another type of UN or non government organization, Pope Francis often says. The Holy Spirit breathes life, warmth, goodness, faith and charity into our world through his Church, through us.

“Peace I bequeath to you”. The peace of Christ is “a peace the world cannot give”. All of us know what it is to be anxious, worried, fearful, deprived. People battle with these feelings everyday. Jesus promises us peace – his peace. When did you last experience the peace of Jesus? Was it in a few quiet moments in the church before Mass begun today? Will it be in the quiet of Holy Communion, when Jesus makes his home in you and me today? Was it at your last Confession, with the peace and freedom of Absolution, God’s forgiveness, pardon, mercy? Was it perhaps for our older parishioners when you last received the Anointing of the Sick? “Peace I bequeath to you” Jesus says: the peace of Christ is our inheritance, Christ’s abundant blessing. “Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.”

From the Upper Room of the Last Supper, the Word of God takes us to a lofty mountain, radiant and beautiful, the City of God. St John records for us his experience of a vision of Heaven, where God is enthroned in the company of the saints, the angels his servants, the joy of song, the light of the Lamb of God.

Yes this is a vision of Heaven. But it is also a description of the Church, our Sunday worship. Our churches must be beautiful places because here in God’s House God makes his home among us, Christ the Lamb offers himself in Sacrifice on our Altar, God gathers his people – just as we are gathered now in song and praise, prayer and silence, faith, hope and love. Everything about our worship must be beautiful – a pure heart; noble vessels, vestments and books; quality music; a dignified and ordered celebration; sincere prayer. In the Sunday readings God speaks to us. In Holy Communion we taste Heaven. In the Sacred Liturgy, our Sunday Mass, the doors of Heaven are open to us.