

Easter 6C

When the country needs a new Prime Minister MP's will normally sound out the prospective candidates on various issues before making up their minds. But all they have to go on is the candidate's words and they can often come cheap.

If you remember from last Sunday's gospel Jesus asks us to love one another but today He focuses in on our love for Him. He emphasises that it is only those who actually keep His words who can lay claim to loving Him. In this sense it's not reduced to a sort of woolly emotionalism divorced from reality. In another part of the gospel Jesus says that the keepers of His Word have their faith built on solid rock whereas those who do not keep His Word built their faith on shifting sands.

Now in order to interpret the word of Jesus in Scripture correctly we need the guidance of Holy Mother Church. We love Jesus but we must also love His Church because the church is His Bride. This mothering role of the church is based on Mary our heavenly mother whom scripture says 'heard the word of God and kept it'.

If Jesus asks us to keep His word then we need to be absolutely sure that the Word we're hearing is interpreted authentically. 'Even the Devil can quote scripture'. This is where the church comes in. We see an example of this in the first reading today where the mother church in Jerusalem was given the final say on certain areas of disagreement among the early Christians. Jesus says: "anyone who hears you (i.e. the Church), hears me. In forming our conscience we are entitled to hear the authentic Word of God not just through Scripture but also Tradition i.e. church teaching. Tradition is the Church's authentic interpretation of Scripture. Catholics are not 'sola scriptura' people. We can't be because scripture says nothing on vital moral issues we are presented with today. For instance it's silent on the morality of cloning, invitro-fertilization, surrogate motherhood, modern day slavery, contraception,

even climate change. But the church, the mouthpiece of Christ, is far from silent on these issues.

However, having heard the true message we can't just pick and choose which words of Christ and His Church we'll obey while side-stepping the more thorny issues. That's far removed from loving God. We saw in the first reading today where certain men from Judea were changing the word of God to suit their own agenda. In response Paul and Barnabas, guided by the Holy Spirit, had some stern words for them. On making up our minds on vital issues of conscience, people today stress the importance of making informed choices. However, the more choices we have on various moral issues the easier it is to decide on the wrong one. We can end up writing our own gospel. Jesus says today: "those who do not love me do not keep my words" and that means all of them without exception.

There is nothing as irritating as someone who rarely keeps their word. But God never baulks on His promises when his word finds a home in our hearts. By obeying His Word as transmitted through Scripture and Tradition we prove our love for Him because it's based on ultimate Truth.