

*Bishop Jodoin's Homely for the
6th Sunday of Easter – May 17th, 2020
In the Saint-Pierre-au-Liens church in Caraquet
(Broadcasted on the radio at 94,1 fm CKLE CJVA
and Live on the Diocese of Bathurst Facebook page)*

As a bishop, and even when I was a parish priest, I meet many mothers and grandmothers who confide in me: "You know, what hurts me most is to see that my children are not going to church. Hardly even one on all my children ever practice. I do not understand. And what breaks my heart is knowing that I have grandchildren who are not even baptized. What have I done wrong, father? I raised them well. They received all the sacraments. They were brought to mass every Sunday. And now, nothing! Is there anything that can be done? "

I tell them, "It is sad and disappointing, but it is not your fault. You don't have to feel guilty. As a mother or grandmother, you have done your best. But faith is a personal decision. Faith is a story of love with God and you cannot force someone to love and you cannot love for them either. Love is mysterious, it's personal and entails a form of freedom. Furthermore, one should not jump to conclusions too quickly. A person can live their faith in other ways. Ways that are unknown to us. We do not know what a person experiences deeply. Only God truly knows his heart. But yes, as a mother and a grandmother, you can do something. "

Saint Peter provides us with the answer in the second reading: *"Have reverence for Christ in your hearts, and honor him as Lord. Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect."* (1 Peter 3, 15-16) That is to say simply testifying of your faith with family, your children and your grandchildren. Manifest through how you live your life what faith brings you. The love of Christ who dwells in your heart. The joy of knowing that you are never alone (the Spirit of God is always with you). And the hope that your life will not end in a cemetery because Christ makes us risen! Did not Christ say to his disciples, *"Your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven. »* (Mt 5,16) Do this testimony gently and with respect. Because as a wise one once said, "Speak only if you are questioned, but live in a way as to be questioned. » Live your faith with your whole being, and one day your children and grandchildren will ask you questions. For they will want to become like you, to discover your secret!

But what is this light that shines in us, if not the presence of love within us! The love of God the Father and of Christ. The Lord said well to his disciples, *"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; my Father will love him and we will come to him."* Believing, having faith, this, is a great story of love with God, a love story that transforms us, like

all love stories do. This is why, during the last meal before his death, Jesus gave this message to his apostles, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."*

"If you love me" ... the "if" is important. It emphasizes that love always calls for freedom. You cannot force someone to love, or love for them. It is up to each person to decide freely. We can deny it and refuse His love. But God, for his part, will still remain faithful and continue to love us.

On the eve of his death, Jesus asked his apostles for the first time to love him. During his public life, Jesus often asked to love: to love God his Father, to love our neighbor, our brothers and our sisters. But that evening, before leaving his disciples, He asked them to love Him, because love calls for communion. When we love, we want to stay with the loved one, to never be separated. And Christ, on the verge of death, does not want to be separated from his apostles (or from us today). He does not want to *"leave us orphaned"*. That is why he promises to come and dwell in our hearts, to be within us, through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, the very Spirit of God, that he will send to us from the Father. Love is an intense desire for communion.

Then Jesus added, *« If you love Me, you will keep « my » commandments. »* Jesus is not referring to God's 10 commandments, the law of Moses. No. He speaks here of *« his »* commandments... and those, are his life, all that he had been. Therefore, to keep his commandments, simply means to be like Him throughout our life – a life given to God and to others, especially those who have the most need (the poor, the sick, those who are rejected, those who are exploited, the less fortunate, the Zacchaeus and the Samaritans of today). Jesus did not say, *"You "must" follow my commandments,"* He simply said, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* For if we love Christ as the Son of God, the ever-living, He will come and dwell in us, and his love will transform us as love transforms those who are loved and wish to be like all those who are loved. And by becoming like Christ, keeping his commandments will come naturally.

Of course, this is a project of a lifetime. It is difficult to achieve perfection. We become better, little by little. And the Spirit of truth is there to breathe new life into us if we are out of breath by following Christ. A religious brother has said, *"I am not yet Christ and I will never be, but I have within me this infinite possibility of becoming so one day!"* And we have time ahead of us. As believers, we have the firm conviction that this love is eternal. Christ leads us to the Father, source of love and of life. Death will not have the last word of our story of love, for our last repose will be in the house of God the Father, where Christ is preparing a place for us, and not in a cemetery. This is the hope that makes us live.

On this Sunday, let us continue to love Christ who is at the heart of our lives. Let this love transform us so that, with gentleness, respect and joy, we may always be witnesses of the hope that makes us live to all our loved ones and to these young generations around us. Amen