Sixth Sunday of Easter B 2024

Once again I reminded of my ordination many years ago at St Benedict’s, Mirehouse. This was the gospel I chose. ‘Love one another as I have loved you’ - it seemed like a good idea at the time - idealistic and simple. It IS a good idea - but ideals get tested and life is rarely simple.

We talk about ‘love’ glibly but we know that to love well is challenging. OK for brief spells of exercise not so easy as a marathon. And we are asked to run this marathon every day! I am sure it is a good idea to move away from dreams of loving to practical deeds of loving. The Devil would be delighted if we lost ourselves in mystical thoughts of love and never actually brought any benefit to our world and to those around us.

Others will make judgements as to whether I have proved to be a loving priest - and I will have to answer for my failings. What is pre-occupying me at the moment is whether we could be judged to be a loving parish. We are lucky that we live in a community that has close bonds but those bonds are much looser than they used to be. We live in a community where faith is still an important force - but infinitely weaker now than in the past. But ARE we still living lives where our love shows? Are we visiting and concerning ourselves with family and neighbours. As your parish priest I am much less able to attend to the spiritual needs of the sick and the housebound than once I could - are all those here who could help bring the spiritual life of the parish into the homes of the sick and housebound willing to do so? I would ask you to consider this - because I am sure there will be some of our older parishioners who will feel themselves to have been abandoned by the church they attended so faithfully all their lives.

If we seem to be characterised by selfishness, unwillingness to forgive, bitterness, then the Devil has little worry about concerning the faith of our parish. But if we choose to be loving, in whatever ways we can find, then we are heeding and obeying Our Lord’s command of love. We will fail at times - but if we pick ourselves up and begin again then we will be seen as a people trying to do the right thing. Seen as loving people in a loving parish.