

St. Joseph's Parish, Ottawa**Roshene Lawson's Reflection for the Sixth Sunday of Easter 2020**

Greetings from St. Vincent Hospital where I am as I share this week's reflection.

In this week's gospel we hear the phrase, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." Every time I read that it almost sounds like something my teenage daughter would say, "If you love me, you'll get me those new shoes I really need (read want)." "If you really love me you won't make me do the dishes right now when I'm watching my show." It feels like a challenge that doubts love rather than affirms it.

In actual fact, we are being reminded (as were Christians during antiquity) that, as Christians, we live by a set of guiding principles and that, even if Christ is no longer with us physically, that we, with the help of the holy spirit sent to us by God, are capable of adhering to them. This message of "if you love me you will keep my commandments" was being shared during a time in history where there was little trust for anyone outside of one's own family and where people often felt danger was lurking around every corner. Not too dissimilar with how some people are feeling during this time of global pandemic. So maybe not so far-fetched to have a reminder of where we really need to be focusing.

Love, the guiding theme in all of this. If we love God, we LIVE God then we live LOVE and we honour the commandments set forth for us. Love is an action that we DO to manifest the love God has for us. It's not just a bunch of words "I love you" or "I love this". It is a verb. An act. A way of helping and supporting one another especially when faced with challenges such as a world pandemic.

So how do we live God and love one another, especially during this pandemic? A time where we are being told to stay home, stay 6 feet apart, wear masks, use extreme caution? A time where some of us feel a similar way to the mood during antiquity. Fear and mistrust of the virus, maybe mistrust or feelings of anger of those not following the rules, or confusion and uncertainty of what rules to follow and how best to live amongst others during these times. How do we live God's commandments and particularly that of love during these difficult times?

We start by suspending judgement. By taking a breath before criticizing someone for wearing a mask or not wearing a mask or for doing groceries in pairs or for going out for a run or a walk that might be necessary for their mental health and wellbeing. Everyone is living

the pandemic differently and withholding judgement is one way to live God's love and God's wish for us to follow God's commandments.

Tangible ways of living God's commandments are found in places like Hamilton, Ontario where churches are opening their doors (safely) to the homeless so they have somewhere to be, to receive care and to receive food. People are potentially putting themselves in harm's way at a time when we are being told to steer clear of others and are serving some of the most vulnerable members of society with grace and with dignity. THAT's the embodiment of love.

Our own St. Joe's Supper Table has been stepping forward to feed those who are dealing with food insecurity. More remarkable now during these times of fear and worry about possibly being exposed to COVID. While they are taking precautions, it is still an act of love to put oneself out there during a time when many are too fearful to leave their homes.

Here at St. Vincent Hospital we put out a call asking people to knit blankets for our patients who are struggling because of visitor restrictions keeping families from visiting loved ones. We have had over 100 blankets made for our patients by people wanting to help and

comfort others who are suffering. These blankets go a long way to comforting patients.

Recently we had a patient with us whose spouse died right after COVID visitor restrictions were implemented. This patient was devastated at not being able to be present at their spouses death and even more upset when it was time to go home for the first time in over 5 decades without their spouse. We brought this patient one of the comfort blankets, the nursing staff and myself (all in proper PPE) hugged the blanket and wrapped it around this patient telling them that when they are feeling lonely and afraid to put the blanket on and we'd be hugging them. Without the loving act of someone taking the time to create these blankets, we could not have offered such an important ritual for this patient to have in their most difficult time. The love provided through the knitted blankets transformed into the patient feeling loved instead of completely alone. Again, the embodiment of God's love for us through our love for the other...the act of creating a comfort blanket to show others they're safe and loved.

Caring for the disenfranchised, feeding the hungry, knitting blankets of love and comfort, sewing masks, raising money, checking in

on each other – these are all the hallmarks of how we live and share in God's love.

So in these times where fear can sometimes be the driving emotion, it is more important than ever to take a step back, take a deep breath and remember that God loves us and that God's love empowers us to love and care for others and that is how we show we love God and keep God's commandments.

Peace to you and yours as we navigate these unusual times.

Roshene Lawson