

HOLY SATURDAY 2023

When was the very last time anyone told you that they loved you, that you were lovable?

When was the last time anyone said just how pleased they were that you existed, that you bring value to their lives?

When was the last time that someone pointed out just how wonderful and how remarkable you are?

When was the last time anyone told you that you are worth all the trouble?

If you were listening to the liturgy of the Word this evening, then you have just had all that said in many and varied ways. In fact, if you have listened to the homilies, and talks these past days then you could not have failed to have heard the good news, the extraordinary good news. You are radiant with a love that is not of your own design. God has been proclaiming this to you through the prayers and gestures of the liturgy, the beautiful music, the conversations you have had formally and informally. Faith has been experienced through witness. Pope Francis spoke of this on his visit to Kazakhstan in September 2022:

“If we look more closely, what do we see? That the faith was not passed down from generation to generation as a set of ideas to be understood and followed...No, our faith was passed on through life, through witnesses who shed the light of the Gospel on different situations...to spread the consoling warmth of Jesus, the joy of his saving love and the hope of his promise...we learn that faith grows through witness. May we never grow weary of bearing witness to the very heart of salvation, to the newness of Jesus, to the newness that is Jesus!”

Faith is transmitted through witness. I would therefore like to say that you have certainly lifted the heart of this disciple of Jesus and your presence with us has been an inspiration to me. So, in case you missed the message from God’s Word: You are loved and valued, and you are a living witness to the fact that Christ is alive. I do not believe in the resurrection because I have read about in a book, I believe in the resurrection because I have seen it in your faces. I see him in you and I am overwhelmed with joy.

So can I personally thank you for deciding to join us on the journey from Holy Thursday up to now. Thank you for talking the time out to stop, look and listen. It is when we walk together, that we recognise the presence of Christ living among us. As Pope Benedict wrote in his very first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*:

“Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become “one body”, completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and love of neighbour are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself.”

It is in our communion, our common-union, different as we are, that the wonder of God becomes manifest. The very dynamite of our Baptism which we will renew this evening, invites us to participate fully in the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. None of us are mere spectators in the Christian adventure. The resurrection is not about a dead man coming back to life, nor even that we too will go to heaven, but rather it is an invitation to contribute, to participate actively in renewing the face of the earth. The resurrection gives birth to missionary disciples, it presents us with work to do. God desires partners, not puppets.

This evening we are fortunate in having 'living signs' of participation, of partnership because we will, for the first time, witness the reception of four people who are preparing to be Oblates of this monastic community. Sarah Walker, Karen Ziglam, Nik Birkett and Sarah Oakham, they will enter a 'new communion' with us as partners in prayer and in participating in our mission as Benedictine monks. You are most welcome and are so needed.

From the very earliest days of monastic life, lay people have felt a call to be spiritually united with monasteries. People who found that the Rule of St Benedict could provide real nourishment and a sense of direction for their own walk with Christ. St Benedict in the Rule makes mention of the fact that monasteries are never without guests and that is as it should be. You are a source of great blessing to us. You are a blessing because each guest brings an opportunity to encounter Jesus and it is my prayer that you also have encounter him while being here during this Triduum.

We have no other reason as monks to exist, except to enable Jesus to be met, to be loved, to be worshipped and to be embraced. Our Oblates are therefore an extremely important extension of this monastic family, and I would hope that as we move forward our partnership in mission will increase. I will turn my thoughts to mission tomorrow because if we are an Easter people, then we are a people who are permanently on mission; we want others to experience Jesus just as we have.

Some of you have been acquainted with this monastic community for many years and your friendship, loyalty and support is very much appreciated and does not go unnoticed. You have seen us become smaller in number. But I want to give you a clear message this evening in the power and in the light of Christ. Smaller does not mean less committed. Smaller does not mean any less vibrant with faith. I have a strong conviction and talking with many of you has strengthened that conviction, there is a hunger for God and God is certainly hungry with love for you. We need to bring these two hungers together because then we will witness to and experience hope. We will see life change.

We walk together in the power of Christ who is love and so I leave you with these words of Ramon of Llull a thirteenth century mystic:

*"The lover was asked to whom he belonged. He answered: To Love.
What are you made of? Love
Who gave you birth? Love
Where were you born? In love.
How do you live? By love
What is your name? Love
Where are you going? To Love
Where are you now? In love
Have you anything other than love? Yes, I have faults and failings against my beloved.
Is there pardon in your beloved? There is mercy and forgiveness and so I live in love and live with hope."*

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB
8 April 2023