

‘A Revolution in God’ – A Homily for Easter III

At the heart of our Easter faith is the understanding taken from the First Epistle of John that, ‘God is love and those who live in love, live in God and God lives in them.’ This is nothing less than a revolution in God. Before this we have the Greek tradition where God is eternal and unchanging, unmoved, impassible, dazzling but remote. Before this revolution we have the Hebrew tradition, “I Am;” a God who ties himself to human community, speaking justice and judgement.; Loving King and Ruler, but not yet love itself, not quite yet. But here there is something new, ‘God is love,’ a revolution in God and a revolution in us.

When Jesus asked us to call God “Father,” something so fresh, so amazing was coming into being, a new way of understanding who God is in God’s Self. No longer a self-sufficient monad in the sky, but now eternally the Father who begets the Son, the One who is by giving himself away and receiving himself; the one who is by being given back in gratitude and joy. Wow, this is a dynamic God, a risky God, a giving God. There is nothing of defensiveness here, nothing about the need to be right, to be contained or controlled, just the ecstatic joy of being poured out into another life.

It is of course the incarnation, cross and resurrection that make this vision possible. Look at this Jesus-shaped life, of boundaries transgressed by the out-pouring of love, of judgements overturned, of exiles transformed to homecomings. Look at the cross, that in the worst nightmare of human violence possible, this God holds out his arms in welcome. Forget recrimination, here is love at its most powerful and its most vulnerable, hoping, embracing, gathering, turning the worst betrayals into welcome, overturning death with life. And look at the resurrection, of

a human life escaping the boundaries of death, exploding outward and given back to the world in the abundance of forgiveness and of peace restored. It is all of this that makes the vision possible, for no one has seen the Father, but the Son, and he has made him known.

But this is only half the story, the vision of God radicalised, of a ‘God who is love.’ For the other half is the story of ourselves, welcomed into a community of love, where a new us is made possible by love. ‘Those who live in love live in God and God lives in them.’ This is nothing less radical and revolutionary, a new vision of what is possible when we conceive of a God of love. A new vision of what is possible for the human being, a new vision of what is possible for us, for you and me in this place now. There is something exciting going on here, a discovery that what it actually means to be human can only be found when we discover who God is, when we discover that we are already caught up in the movement of love, the love of a Father and a Son, scooping us up by the power and presence of the Spirit who is love. God’s life pouring out towards us and in us and through us, an ecstatic outpouring of love.

In the news these last couple of weeks we have seen buildings and communities ripped apart by violence. The violence of fire devastating an iconic religious building in Paris, the violence of human terror as unsuspecting worshippers and holiday-makers were thrown into the nightmare of fundamentalist hatred and aggression. Our religious tradition knows of such violence and takes it seriously indeed. In our first reading today, a zealous Saul, ‘still breathing threats and murder’ is met on the way by crucified and risen Love, and the overwhelming brightness of the vision shocks him into blindness. Here love confronts violence and utterly condemns it, exposing its fraudulent attempts to proclaim itself as religious and pure. This zeal, declares crucified and risen Love, is nothing but fear itself, self-

loathing and self-destructive. And in our gospel, Jesus meets Peter, the one who denied him at a moment of extreme political violence. But once again, the violence of the moment is overcome by forgiving love, as Jesus recreates Peter's moment of denial by building a new fire and asking three times if he loves him. These three imperatives of love enfold and transform the three-fold denial of just days before. And Peter, like Saul, is left utterly undone and remade.

'God is love.' Can we, like Saul and Peter, allow such a vision of God to utterly transform our lives, taking us from our self-obsessed fantasies of zeal and self-righteousness into a place of self-gift? By the Spirit's power, we can. AMEN.