

Reflection for Easter 6

If someone were to say to you "To know me is to love me", you might be forgiven for thinking that this is someone who is more than a little conceited. Nevertheless, it is, in effect, the claim that is made by Jesus in our passage from St John's Gospel today. He does not put it in those words, but the clear implication of this passage is that to know him is indeed to love him: this is part of the message that St John wanted us to understand when he put together this series of sayings of Jesus. He wanted to convey to us his own experience, that the more people got to know Jesus, the more they loved him.

According to St John, Jesus lived in conscious awareness that his authority came from his Father. Just as he knew and loved the Father, so he elicited love from those who knew him: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." To know him is to love him, and to be drawn into the source of that love that casts out fear – not as servants but as friends.

So to know and to love are closely bound together. But in today's readings there is a third element in our relationship to Jesus: not only to know and to love, but also to obey. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." The first letter of John says, "The love of God is this, that we obey his commandments." At first sight this might look suspiciously like emotional blackmail. We are all familiar with the temptation to use love as a weapon to control, to manipulate, to get our own way. There is no more powerful sanction than the threat to withdraw affection, and the more the threat is repeated the more insidious the process becomes.

However, when Jesus links love and obedience, he is certainly not relying on any kind of threat, or seeking to force peoples' hands. The obedience he is looking for springs out of their relationship with him and with his heavenly Father, and it brings that relationship full circle: "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you."

So then, the message of St John, both in his Gospel and the epistles, is this: to know Jesus is to love him, to love him is to obey him, and to obey him is to find perfect freedom in his service. We do not need detailed codes of morality to tell us what our duty is and what will become of us if we fall short. Our duty is simply to respond with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, to the love we have encountered in Jesus.

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