

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER [A]

Acts 8: 5 - 8, 14 - 17

1 Peter 3: 15 - 18

John 14: 15 – 21

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free."

Those famous words are inscribed on a bronze plaque inside the Statue of Liberty on Ellis Island, in New York Harbour.

The place where many millions of immigrants, and refugees tasted for the first time the air of their new life in: 'The land of the free.'

'The Star Spangled Banner:' USA National Anthem by Francis Scott Key

I wonder what it feels like to be forced, for whatever reason, from the home, and country you love?

Then, instead of finding safety, and understanding in the country you've fled to, you're: "Despised and rejected." Is. 53: 3 instead.

The early Christians felt that very keenly.

They had a liberating message to give people, but were persecuted for preaching about being: "Brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." Rm. 8: 21 to be experienced in following Jesus.

Peter, who was martyred in Nero's Circus Vaticanus in Rome for following Jesus, sums it up in these words in his First Letter.

"I am writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners, as aliens and strangers in the world."

1 Pt. 1: 1 & 1 pt. 2: 11

We may not know it but we're refugees from our: "Eternal home in heaven." 2 Cor. 5: 1

To be a refugee must be awful, but how much worse to be a refugee and an orphan, on your own with no-one to love you.

I know there are many, many Christian's who feel like that.

They don't know that: "God is love." 1 Jn. 4: 16

They don't know Jesus as their friend, because they can't quite believe it when He says: "You are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me." Jn. 15: 15

They don't know their home is in heaven, where they will dwell eternally in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I wonder if you, even though you've been a Christian for a very long time, ever feel like that?

Do you feel like an orphan with no-one to love, and care for you?

Do you feel as if Jesus has abandoned you, and left you on your own?

Well, He hasn't. He made a promise: "I will not abandon you as orphans. I will come to you." Jn. 14: 18

With those words He prepared His Disciples for that day when He was lifted up on the Cross, and laid stone-cold dead in the tomb. Also preparing them for that day when He physically Ascended to His Father; to His eternal home.

There, as Jesus said: to prepare a place for you? [And] when everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am." Jn. 14: 2 – 3

Remember, after the Resurrection, Jesus said to Thomas: "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me." Jn. 20: 29

We haven't seen Jesus with our eyes, and yet we believe; and we'll find the answer to why we do in a verse from the Gospel where Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit:

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. You know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." Jn. 14: 16 – 18

The Blessed John Henry Newman was, in so many ways, a man ahead of his time.

In a real sense a Biblical theologian: and one who didn't allow himself to blindly follow the trendy, liberal theologians of his day.

He listened to the Holy Spirit, and followed His promptings in perfect, loving obedience to the Word of God, embodied in the belief of the Church of his Lord, Jesus.

I think the motto he took when he was created a Cardinal – 'Heart Speaks Unto Heart' – and his epitaph – 'Out Of Shadows And Images Into Truth,' – illuminate more than anything the heart of the man.

When he was 15 when, as he writes in his autobiography, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*: "He came to rest in 'the thought of two and two only absolute and self-evident beings, myself and my Creator.'"

Mgr. Roderick Strange: A Mind Alive; p. 13

What the Blessed John Henry knew personally, and runs like a seam of pure gold through his preaching, and writing, is that personal, indwelling of Jesus in the believer that he experienced in August 1816.

In a sermon preached in St. Mary's, the University Church, here in Oxford, when he was its Vicar he said: "Let us not for a moment suppose that God the Holy Spirit comes in such sense that God the Son remains away. The Holy Spirit causes the indwelling of Christ in the heart. The Holy Spirit, then, vouchsafes to us, that by his coming Christ may come to us, not visibly, but may enter into us."

J. H. Newman: Parochial and Plain Sermons VI, 10

The Blessed John knew that indwelling, personal presence of Jesus from the age of 15, then throughout his entire life, and into the eternal life he's now enjoying in the communion of love, which is the Holy Trinity. That experience changed him forever: He said: "It made me a Christian."

J. H. Newman: Autobiographical Writings; 150, 268

As he wrote at the end of his life, he found it: "Difficult to realize or imagine the identity of the boy before and after August 1816"; as he looked back over seventy years, he could only see 'another person'"

Rev. Dr. Ian Ker: John Henry Newman; A Biography, p. 3

Jesus was physically with the Disciples, He lived with them, but after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost He would live in them.

But, it's not a gift just for the Apostles, for St. Paul, and the New Testament Christians.

It's the self-same gift, which the Lord gave to John Henry Newman, and gives to us all: the indwelling, and personal presence of Jesus in each Christian.

It's something that can really make your Christian life blossom.

It's something to reflect and contemplate on, and a gift to ask the Lord to give to you.

If, then, the Spirit plants the real presence of Christ in each Christian then that makes perfect sense of what Jesus means when He says: "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father." Jn. 14: 12

Because of our faith, Christ indwells us and, because of that, we're His living presence to others.

What the Lord wants us to do for Him is summed up in His words: "If you love me, obey my commandments."

Jn. 14: 15

On my own I find it impossible to attain that command to love as Jesus first loved me.

But I'm not on my own, because Jesus promised I wouldn't be:

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you." Jn. 14: 16

The Holy Spirit, who brings Jesus to indwell my life, so that I can begin to love as Jesus loves.

I can also stop worrying that I'm never quite achieving that goal, for the simple reason that Jesus isn't out there somewhere.

He's in here, and will never leave me.

That takes the guilt, worry, and burden out of being a Christian:

"Worship Christ as the Lord of your life. [Peter wrote] And if someone asks you about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it." 1 Pt. 3: 15

If we follow that advice, then people will begin to come to faith in Christ, and their lives will be changed forever.

An indwelling: "Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see." Heb. 11: 1

Faith that's built on the foundation stone that: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. [Jesus, who] was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit." 2 Cor.5: 21 & 1 Pt. 3: 18

So that He wouldn't: "Leave you as orphans [but] come to you; to live with you and be in you." Jn. 14: 18 & 17