

6th SUNDAY OF EASTER

Before people go for a job interview they usually spruce themselves up, dust themselves down, then check with their family or friends if they look alright. Minor adjustments are made, assurances of “not to worry” are urged. On the way to the interview the hopefuls might even whisper a telegram to St. Jude, traditional patron of hopeless cases. Resumes have already been sent ahead, advance notice of past accomplishments that are supported by important referees. The gaps have been covered as well as can truthfully be managed. All these reports now lie on the table in the interview room. Dry throats are watered, moist palms are rubbed, nervousness is covered with a slightly forced smile. The interview begins. The agenda is themselves.

People go through all this anxiety and strain in the hope that they will be selected for the job. The prospect of rejection is real, but the strenuous hope of being chosen gives them courage to face the probing questions. To be chosen is to be picked out, opted for, preferred, taken on. All this makes the risk of refusal worthwhile.

It is only when the applicants are chosen for the job that they are free to take it or leave it. Before being accepted they are in no position to *choose* the job that is advertised. In applying they declare that they **want** the position, but wishes aren't choices. Only after acceptance have they the actual *power* to choose the job or not.

When John talks about the love of God in today's readings, he is clear what he means – “this is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us.” The same message is underlined in the Gospel: “You did not choose me, no I chose you.” We don't have to turn up to an interview to discover if God will choose us or not: God has already made an everlasting decision to love us. God's love is not an issue, it is not a matter of speculation. It is there.

God's love is first, and it is only because of the primacy of God's love that we have the power and the freedom to choose God.

God has opted for us, God has declared his choice, God has taken us on. It is a decisive movement of love that began with the Father. The hope is expressed that we can come to appreciate God's choice of us. It is such good news that John is anxious to get the message through to us, simply and clearly. Can we remain in – can we trust - the love that chooses us ?

God's loving choice is made visible in the love of Jesus. If the supreme act of love is to lay down your life for the sake of others, Jesus shows that he could have no greater love. His love takes him to the cross, just as the Father's love raises him up. Jesus spends himself, he gives of himself until there is nothing left to give. He empties himself.

In everything that he did, Jesus kept on choosing to love. He did not choose to love once upon a time. He chose to love at all times. It drained him. That self-giving quality of divine love that can be seen in the lives of many people. One doctor saw it in a way that he can never forget. As a young medical student he watched an unusual operation in a London hospital. Later on he wrote:

It was the first time that this particular brain operation had been carried out in this country. It was performed by one of our leading surgeons upon a young man of great promise for whom, after an accident, there seemed to be no other remedy. It was an operation of the greatest delicacy, in which a small error would have had fatal consequences. In the outcome the operation was a triumph; but it involved seven hours of intense and uninterrupted concentration on the part of the surgeon. When it was over, a nurse had to take him by the hand, and lead him from the operating theatre like a blind man or a little child.

That kind of self-giving and concentration on the needs of another reflect something of the quality of God's love in Jesus. Jesus hopes that we will choose to keep on giving ourselves in love, even when the giving hurts, even when we feel we have nothing left but our exhausted presence. But it's that *kind* of love that mirrors God's kind of love. As Jesus said himself, the love that costs nothing can be managed by anyone. But authentic love *costs* – it costs the complete giving of self as Jesus did.

We have to admit that few of us have the freedom or the power to accomplish this. We can only choose to **try**, confident that our struggle is backed by God's energetic love. Somewhere in the struggle we can hear the voice of God cheering us on.