

LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

speak. This is the very same Jesus who calmed the storm and brought the Apostles' boat to land; the same Jesus who walked on water and made Peter able to stride above the waves until Peter's faith and courage failed; the same Jesus who read the mind of the Samaritan woman, telling her that she had been married five times and now lived with a sixth man; the same Jesus who sent the man born blind to wash in Siloam and the man saw for the first time; the same Jesus who raised the son of the widow of Nain to life; who raised up Jairus' dead daughter to life; who called out *Lazarus! Come forth!* and the mourners saw the dead man arise and come out of the tomb alive while still wrapped in the burial clothes. And this is the same Jesus who died, rose, was seen for by upwards of 500 people (says St. Paul) and, while the Apostles witnessed, ascended to Heaven.

The wondrous thing is the **Jesus had the power to overcome all the trials of life and death. He could have avoided death as he did at Nazareth but he did not, even telling Peter to put his sword away.**

Jesus went to the cross willingly. He offered himself to the Father for you because he loves you.

Easter Season Blessing

May almighty God, who has redeemed us and made us his children through the resurrection of his Son our Lord, bestow upon you the riches of his blessing. **AMEN.**

May God, who through the water of baptism has raised us from sin into newness of life, make you holy and worthy to be united with Christ for ever. **AMEN.**

May God, who has brought us out of bondage to sin into true and lasting freedom in the Redeemer, bring you to your eternal inheritance. **AMEN.**

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. **AMEN.**

Please prepare John 17: 11b-19 for next Sunday.

THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER



Volto Santo

(Italian: 'Sacred Face')

A large wooden Crucifix hangs in Lucca Cathedral whereon Christ is shown fully robed. According to an early medieval tradition, this Crucifix was an actual portrait of Christ made by Nicodemus who had helped to bury Jesus. There are also fanciful legends about its miraculous arrival in Lucca. It was eventually moved to the Cathedral. The statue is said to have been in the city from the 8th century; however the present Volto Santo is a (perhaps) 13th century copy of an 8th century original. The commercial importance of Lucca in the Middle Ages helps explain the appearance of a number of 12th--15th century copies of the Volto Santo throughout Europe.

ADAPTED FROM THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF ART

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Note: You may recall that the Early Church did not use the crucifix. Even after Emperor Constantine (died 336) had outlawed its use in executions, the people of the early Church were too close to the horror of the cross to find it meaningful as an object of devotion. ¹ From the second to the sixth century the Church used statues and paintings of Christ as the Good Shepherd carrying mankind depicted as his sheep.

"Clothed" crosses of the eternally crucified/eternally living Christ the King (such as the *Volto Santo*) began to be developed after Christianity was perhaps 500 years old, "Unclothed" crosses of the dead Jesus (*The Realistic Crucifix*) became dominate in the 13th century.

Today's Gospel Saint John 15:9-17 [Year B, Easter 6]

✠ AS THE FATHER HAS LOVED ME, SO I HAVE LOVED YOU; ABIDE IN MY love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. **'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.** No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another". [© NRSV]

He's Not a Great Moral Teacher

You've heard skeptics say, "I don't really think he was the Son of God. What I admire him for was that he was a great moral teacher."

Really, he wasn't! The morality taught by Christ is the

¹ A modern example of being too close to such horror would be the distaste most would feel if our parish church were to replace the current devotional statues of Christ with new models in which Jesus was depicted as strapped into an electric chair or hanging from a noose.

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same morality that Judaism taught then and teach today. In general terms, its the morality then taught and taught today by nearly all people of the world. Last week we mentioned that the last six of the Ten Commandments (Prayer Book Page 351) are *Natural Law*, common to the entire world. Jesus' unique contribution is the commandment ² of love. A version appears in today's Gospel: **'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'**

He frequently claims to be the Son of God and therefore equal to the Spirit and the Father. Honoring Jesus as *just a extraordinary moral teacher* really doesn't make sense. At the end of Matthew's Gospel he orders his followers to honor him as God and Baptize people using a Trinitarian formula. He says, *Go unto all nations and Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

These are either:

1) the words of a madman and who would want to follow him? OR

2) they're the words of a liar and blasphemer and who would want to follow him? OR

3) they're the words of the Son of God, and who would not want to follow him? We honor Jesus because he is God/man.

His greatest act of love is the cross. Recall how he went to the cross willingly? He could have stopped his death. This is Jesus, the very one who had earlier walked through the crowd at Nazareth, a crowd who fully intended to throw him off the hill upon which the village lay. This is he who also had the power to change water into wine; the same Jesus who fed 5000 on a little boy's lunch; who healed the sick, who made it possible that the blind see and the deaf hear and the dumb

² Today's Gospel comes from John's version of the Last Supper. The Latin for *commandment* (*mandare*) gives us the term, *maundy*, from which we get Maundy Thursday, or *Commandment Thursday*.