

Sixth Sunday of Easter
Year A, 2026

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

1 Pt 3:15-18

Ps 66

Jn 14:15-21

Keep my commandments ... with gentleness and reverence

When we hear the words “*keep my commandments,*” there can be a real temptation to think of a checklist: don’t lie, don’t steal, go to Mass, say your prayers. And those things matter – they matter greatly. But Jesus does not say, “*If you obey me, you will love me.*” He says it the other way around. “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*” Love comes first. Obedience flows from love; not the other way around. And that order makes all the difference.

Jesus frames the entire moral life of his disciples not as a code of conduct, but as a relationship. *If you love me.* That little conditional – *if* – is not a threat. It is an invitation. It is the same *if* a parent means when they say to a child: “*If you trust me, take my hand.*” The commandments of Jesus are not the bars of a cage. They are the way markers for one who has said yes to love and now walks in its direction.

And what are his commandments? In John’s Gospel, twice Jesus gives this command to his disciples: “*Love one another as I have loved you*” (13:34, 15:12). That is the whole law of the New Covenant. Everything else is commentary on what that love looks like in practice – in the family, in the workplace, in the pew next to us, in traffic, online, at the dinner table.

So the first question this gospel puts to us is not *“Are you following the rules?”* It is *“Do you love me?”* Because if you do – truly, deeply, love the Lord Jesus – the keeping will follow. Certainly not perfectly or without struggle. But it will follow.

Now we look to our second reading, from the first letter of St Peter, who is writing to scattered Christian communities under pressure. These Christian disciples are different from their neighbors, who are asking awkward questions of them and sometimes even suspecting them of disloyalty. He gives them practical advice for living as Christians in a world that doesn’t share their faith.

Peter tells them to *“sanctify Christ as Lord in their hearts”* and to *“always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks [them] for a reason for [their] hope.”* But they are to do this *“with gentleness and reverence.”* The words he uses are striking: *“with gentleness”* – *prautēs* in Greek, which means gentleness, meekness – a word that in the ancient world carried the image of a powerful horse, bridled. Gentleness is not weakness, but disciplined strength. And alongside it: *phobos* – reverence, a holy awe, a recognition that we stand before something – Someone – far greater than ourselves.

Peter is talking specifically about giving an account of the hope that is in you. When someone asks why you believe, why you live the way you live, why you seem to have a peace they can’t quite explain – answer them. But answer gently. Answer reverently.

Don't bludgeon. Don't perform. Don't condescend. Don't moralize. This is the *how* of Christian witness.

Put the two readings together and we have something beautiful and complete. John tells us the *root* of Christian life: love. Peter tells us *manner* of Christian life: gentleness and reverence. You could say that John gives us the engine and Peter gives us the steering wheel. Love impels us (2 Cor 5:14), gentleness and reverence direct us.

We live in a moment when Christians are tempted toward one of two errors. The first error is harshness – the faith as weapon, the commandments as hammer, the truth wielded without love, without listening, without the tenderness of a God who became a child in a manger. The second error is vagueness – the faith as mere feeling, the commandments dissolved into sentiment, love without structure, without the courage to say *this is true and that is not; this is right and that is wrong*.

Jesus and Peter, together, refuse both errors. Jesus says: *love*, and from that love, *keep the commandments*. Do not let love become an excuse to abandon what is true and good. Peter says: when you hold what is true and good, hold it *gently*. Hold it *reverently*. Remember that the person across from you is also made in the image of God. Remember that you, too, were once in darkness. Remember that it was not your cleverness or your virtue that

brought you to faith – it was grace. *“It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you”* (Jn 15:16).

Let me try to make this concrete, to leave you with something you can actually reflect on and do.

Think of one relationship in your life where you know the truth – you know what is right, what is good, what needs to be said – but you have been saying it, or living it, in a way that has more edge than warmth. Maybe it is with a grown child or grandchild who has drifted from the faith. Maybe it is with a spouse, a sibling, a coworker, a friend whose choices worry you. Maybe it is on social media, where it is so easy to be technically right and relationally disastrous. Ask the Lord this week: Lord, how would you have me hold this truth? Not whether to hold it – but *how*. With what gentleness? With what reverence for the soul in front of me? With what patience and longsuffering?

And think also of one area in your own life where a shallow or lukewarm “love” has been your excuse not to keep the commandments, where you may have said to yourself, “God loves me, so it doesn’t really matter.” But it does matter. Not because God’s love is conditional – it is not – but because love, when it is real, changes us. If I truly love someone, I become the kind of person they can count on. I grow. I show up. I try again when I fail. *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments...”* not in order to earn love, but as the natural fruit of love received and returned.

“By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples” (Jn 15:8).

The Advocate whom Jesus promises in today’s Gospel – the Holy Spirit – is the one who makes both of these things possible. It is the Spirit who pours love into our hearts, as Paul says in his letter to the Romans (8:5), so that we are not obeying from fear but from fullness. And it is the Spirit who gives us the gentleness and reverence Peter calls for, because those are fruits of the Spirit – *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* – listed by name in the letter to the Galatians (5:22-23).

We cannot manufacture these things. We can only ask for them, open ourselves to them, and then practice them – imperfectly, repeatedly, hopefully – in the ordinary moments of every day.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And you will keep them gently. And you will keep them reverently. And the world, which is desperately hungry for something that is both true and tender, will notice. And so will I, for “whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.”

Lord Jesus, as we keep your commandment of love, and as we offer you the sacrifice of love in the holy Eucharist, as we do this in remembrance of you, according to your command, reveal yourself to you, so that we will at last realize that as you are in the Father, so we are in you and you are in us. Amen.