

6th Sunday of Easter, Year "A"
"Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father"

I enjoyed reading a story from a friend entitled, "JUST BEGIN." According to the story, just after a young man received the fee structure from his university for his PhD totaling N850,000 in 2012, he went to present it to his father at the Cooperative Bank in Kaduna. He explained to his father that he had received the admission letter, and his father smiled. Then the dialogue begins.

"I told him however, 'Baba, there is a problem. The school fee is N850,000.'

"He held my hands, then slowly, but reassuringly, said, 'Just begin, my son.'

"To affirm his point, he went home and wrote me a check for N14,000 from an account that had only N20,000.

"I was touched. Then, I added N16000 and paid N30,000 into the school account, and my journey to my PhD began.

"At some point before my dissertation defense, I wanted to give up. I still had a solid N300,000 to pay, and they wouldn't give me a chance for my final defense.

"Then came a very unlikely help. I had supported a gentleman to undertake a project evaluation two times in the year. I received his call cautiously asking me to meet him. He was carrying a brown envelope in his hand.

"He began, 'Aliyu, you will forgive me if you find my action inappropriate. For two consecutive times you had given me a job without asking for a cent. This is very unusual with many people. I did not know how to approach you, but I am deep with gratitude. Please accept my small gift.'

"I quickly peered into the envelope and saw that there were two bundles, likely in hundreds. He confirmed that it was N200,000.

"I couldn't believe it. The words of my father, 'My son, just begin,' came to mind.

"Today, having achieved my dream, I remember the words of my father – "Just begin...."

"Just begin, no matter how difficult it seems to be. It may appear difficult at the beginning, but as time lapsed, I realized dad was right.... In everything you do, always remember, 'JUST BEGIN.'
(Unknown author)

Like the young man of our story, the apostles were not sure of the way forward with Jesus who was about to leave them to ascend to the Father. The obstacles seemed insurmountable, and with Jesus not in their midst to guide and direct them, they would be totally lost.

In the midst of their struggle, Jesus gave them the tools of the trade for the way forward – "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept because it neither sees nor knows Him."

The commandment that opens us up to this spiritual empowerment is the commandment to love God and to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Just as worldly people do not understand the things of the spirit, so is it difficult for selfish people to understand and appreciate the power of love which is the summary of all the commandments given by God.

In this world, distractions and obstacles are inevitable. Obstacles and challenges are not ends in themselves but means to an end. They are the important steps we must take, the wall of Jericho we must destroy or the Red Sea we must swim or walk across. The way we respond to obstacles could make or mar our vocation in life.

The one thing that people who have successfully overcome obstacles have in common is their ability to hold on to something greater than themselves. It could be a simple piece of advice like "Just begin, my son," or the powerful words of Jesus in the Gospel today, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

The greatest challenge of our time is this coronavirus pandemic. The world as we used to know it has changed a lot due to the effects of this pandemic. The safer-at-home principle has become the survival principle. This could be a time for us to re-examine our priorities to know the best way forward.

This could also be a good bonding time for families who hardly have quality time to spend together. This could be a time to deepen our prayer life and to read some of the books we had always longed to read. This could become an opportune time to reach out to loved ones and to reconcile with them.

The tool of the trade given to us by Jesus today is love. Even if you are not able to read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, putting the commandment to love into practice gives us the full and complete meaning of Scripture. Hence, Jesus says whoever keeps the commandment (to love) and observes them is the one that loves Him. "And whoever loves ME will be loved by My Father, and I will love him/her and reveal Myself to him/her."

Given the challenging circumstances of our time, it may seem difficult to put love into practice as everyone is fighting for self-survival. If you happen to feel that way, my piece of advice to you remains, "Just begin, my son" or "Just begin, my daughter."

"Just begin," may sound like a simple piece of advice, but the weight of the advice depends on where it comes from and the action that follows it. By supporting his son with N14,000 from his meager account, the father showed not only faith in his word but also in his son.

Jesus showed His love for us by dying on the cross for our salvation. It is not enough to say we love God. Faith without good works is dead. This pandemic era becomes an opportune time to show our love for God with practical acts of love and compassion.

Our vocation to love becomes an important one, especially in this time when there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel. Whenever the challenge is so great, so is the need for more acts of love in the world. As Martin Luther, Jr., once said, "If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward." Keep loving, and the world will become a better place for all. All who embrace the love of God and put it into practice shall be blessed and shall live to sing Alleluia.