

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; 1 John 4:7-10; John 15:9-17

Love one another as I have loved you!

In our first reading, there was great disagreement among the followers of Jesus about whether Gentiles could be brought into the community of faith. Peter had initially argued that they could not, while Paul argued that they could. Paul won the day but the community itself needed convincing that this break with the past was intended by Jesus. Needing to settle the controversy, Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, tells us of the Roman Centurion, Cornelius. Peter begins by telling of his initial objection to bringing Gentiles into the faith by insisting that he had come to see that God "shows no partiality". While Peter is speaking, an action of God interrupts: the Holy Spirit descends upon Cornelius and his household.

It is important for us to note that God has acted "out of order". Baptism was supposed to come first, then the gift of the Holy Spirit. To use our sacramental terms, confirmation came before baptism and Eucharist for this Gentile household. Fortunately God is concerned about loving His children, not protocol, and offering us the opportunity to love in return. Cornelius and his household were observed "speaking in tongues and glorifying God", outward signs that God had acted. What we do is not nearly as important as what God does and what God wants is for us to be motivated by love and to "show no partiality". Everyone has a place with God.

A few years after that, John reflected on this kind of love in his Gospel. He used the word "love" no fewer than nine times in today's reading. It became the central command of our Christian faith: "love one another as I love you".

So, how did Jesus love us? Two words in this passage tell us. The word "remain" is used in our current translation, the word "abide" was used previously. But it is good here to resurrect the word "abide". We can live somewhere, we can stay somewhere, we can remain somewhere. Each of these phrases speak of being in a certain place, but none of them speak of permanence or intimacy. To abide with someone denotes such intimacy with that person that we have chosen to remain together permanently. To abide with a person is to become so intertwined with love that separation is no longer possible. Jesus has chosen to abide with us and, we must note, He chose first!

Next, John wrote in Greek and could have used one of several words for love. He could have used *eros* which speaks of emotional, human love. He could have chosen *philia*, a type of love that forms the root of our word "family", thus a familial love. Instead, John chose a different word: *agape*.

John used this word differently from how we feel about someone. While that feeling is present, *agape* is notable in that it is a choice to love someone. It is an attitude with a sense of activity about it. More than feeling, *agape* is doing. It is an attitude toward someone that means that despite how I might "feel" about them, I still choose an "attitude" of care and concern. It is a love that is active, that wishes well, that reaches out and is a love that is sacrificial.

We will soon celebrate Pentecost. On that day, we celebrate God's abiding love. The Holy Spirit is God's love permanently among us. We are to love as Jesus has loved us. This love is so powerful it includes the willingness to lay down His life for us. This is the love that is

the mark of the true Christian disciple, the love that is willing to sacrifice.

Many people ask why Catholics keep the body of Jesus on the cross. There are several reasons, not the least among them is that the crucifix is the symbol of Christian love, the symbol of sacrificial love. The crucifix not only tells us what Jesus did for us, it tells us what we are supposed to do!

Catechism of the Catholic Church (paragraphs)

25, 864, 1889 – Motivated by the love that never ends to selfless charity

142-143, 218-221 – God is love. God speaks to all as friends and invites them to share his life in faith.

434-435 – Prayer in the name of the risen Christ

733-736, 2615, 2745 – God's love poured out in the Holy Spirit, nurtures "much fruit"

609, 1822-1825, 1972 – Christ's perfect love and his new commandment

761, 1226 – Baptism is given to those prepared by faith and repentance

1306-1311 – Preparing for confirmation: The baptized "live on" in the love of Christ

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Joy is a state of mind and an orientation of the heart. It is a settled state of contentment, confidence and hope. It is something or someone that provides a source of happiness. It appears 88 times in the Old Testament in 22 books; 57 times in the New Testament in 18 books.

Christians should always find reasons to be joyful. There are many ways to define joy. Joy isn't just a smile or a laugh. Joy is something that is deep within and doesn't leave quickly. When we have the joy of the Lord, we'll know it and so will others. Since joy is given by God and something that He wants us to have, we need to be joyful! In addition to being joyful, we should let others have their joy and not bring them down when they are excited about good things. *The only thing worse than not having joy is stealing someone else's.*^[1]

Spending eternity in Heaven with God, the saints and the angels is something incredible! Ask for joy! If we can't find reasons to be joyful, our perspective must change. God lets us have blessings every day. We should be able to see them and thank God for them. Additionally, we should ask for God's blessings! Some think they should be blessed with joy automatically, but God's Word says "you have not because you do not ask." (John 15:16)^[1] God's Holy Spirit produces joy. Joy is a product of Christ-likeness. When we seek God through His Word and prayer, we will receive joy! Thank God that joy is something He wants us to have!

Joy is the second "fruit of the Spirit," according to Galatians 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is...joy...."