

Sixth Sunday of Easter May 06, 2018

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

The love of God is universal, reaching out to everyone. The Holy Bible gives account of God's love to humanity from the foundation of the world. John in his writing defines God as love. Such an affirmation is simple and absolute. Initial knowledge of divine Love begins with opening Sacred Scripture and discovering the Creator who finds joy in his creation. Nonetheless, to enter into this mystery and truly understand it requires more than intellectual knowledge. To know that God is love requires our participation in his divine love. Authentic knowledge of God is only born in a simple heart that is open and attentive to him. Ultimately, this knowledge of God, of divine Love, is a personal experience. Man's response to divine Love establishes a communion between the Lover and the beloved that results in peace and mutual benevolence. In the first reading of today Peter preaches the Gospel to a genuine audience. As he speaks they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the second reading John tells us that God is love. This love of God for us prompts us to love others. Anyone who fails to love can never have known God, because God is love. In the Gospel Jesus declares that the intimate relationship that the disciples have with Jesus and God the Father must be translated into the disciples' loving one another as Jesus has loved them. Jesus tells his disciples that he has chosen them personally and commissioned them to bear fruit in the Father.

The first reading of today records a significant advancement in the progress of the Gospel as Peter proclaims the Good News within the household of a gentile. From this point on the Acts of the Apostles will trace the spread of the Gospel in the gentile territories and the impact this new venture had on the Church's understanding of Salvation in Jesus Christ. Although Paul will be the main person to go to gentiles, Luke insists that it began with Peter who was the leader of the early church. God had carefully prepared Peter to take this new step. In a vision he was told that he must not consider things unclean what God has accepted as clean. He goes to the house of a gentile, Cornelius and declares that both of them are human beings and so no homage is given to Peter. But it is important to know that God has no partiality in his motive of salvation. He makes the family understand that God loves us abundantly and gives endlessly to us. He has created us equal with a soul and body. He does not look at the age, gender, race or nationality of a person. This is worldly thinking. God sent His beloved Son Jesus to die on the cross for the remission of the sins of all those who will accept Him through perseverance in their living faith and the Sacrament of Baptism. God's will is exhibited as Peter's gentile audience receives the Holy Spirit even as he is speaking. Here again, the spirit takes the initiative. Without hesitation Peter accepts them into the fold.

In today's Second Reading John commands us to love one another because God is love. If God can give us the best of all what he possesses as his sign of love, we too as his children do the same thing and shine in our love by giving generously to all in need. He tells us that whoever does not love does not have God, for God is love. If we claim to be of God but do not have love, we do not have God. If we create disharmony among our friends, our family or our co-workers, division in the Church, display disobedience to God's spiritual laws we cannot claim to have God who is love. If we do so, we are only fooling ourselves for God knows the truth. God the Father has provided us with an astounding proof of his love for us.

He sent his only son to die for us and thereby take away our sins so we may live through Him. The result is that we enjoy a share in God's own life. As children of God, we are called to shine in love so our love may be a reflection of the Divine love of God for the world. Our love for others is a gift of God. It proves that God has begotten us. It proves that we have a genuine knowledge of God. If we do not love others, God is not in our lives because God is love. The love comes from the Father, is accepted by Jesus in full freedom, and then it is spread to others. We have to love others because love is the gift of God.

Today's Gospel passage chosen from the last discourse of Jesus is the continuation of last Sunday's gospel. We had the image of the vine and branches last Sunday to describe the intimate association between Jesus and his followers that was necessary if the disciples had to produce fruit for eternal life. In today's Gospel Jesus urges his followers to abide in his love and to love one another. This love for neighbour must have as its model and exemplar Christ's love for his disciples, which made him, lay down his life for them. The disciples are not Christ's servants but his intimate friends and associates in his work. The passage also emphasizes the divine mutuality as Jesus explains that as the Father loves the Son, so does the Son love the disciples and the disciples are to love one another. Everything is interconnected and the word used is "remain". However, the purpose of this divine mutuality is to bear fruit, meaning that the disciple must do something. Jesus says that they will bear lasting fruit in their life work if they trust in God and are motivated by true love for God and neighbour. They now have the responsibility to keep the commandments of Jesus. What this commandment is getting unfolded in this passage.

The disciples are commanded by Jesus to love one another as he had loved them. This brings us to the important question as to how Jesus showed his love to his disciples. To grasp the full meaning of the command of Jesus we must go back to where this commandment first emerged, namely at the washing of the feet. Jesus after washing the feet of the disciples reflected for them the significance of this gesture. Most obviously it signified service and in the case of Jesus it indicated the ultimate service he would offer his disciples by laying down his life for them. He also demonstrated to them that he was serving them not as a superior serves an inferior but as an equal. He put on the clothing of a servant and washed the feet of his disciples. The sense of equality is expressed by the term friendship. He and the disciples are friends in the deepest sense of that term. Once again Jesus repeats the commandment to love one another as he has loved them. They ought to show their love to each other as friends. Again, as friends they must be willing if necessary to lay down their lives for each other. This is the ultimate friendship. At its deepest level this is a love relationship whose source is the love the Father has for Son and who in turn shares with his chosen ones. The way the disciples are to keep the presence of Jesus alive and active among them after he is gone is by keeping this commandment. They are to love one another as equals and be willing to lay down their lives for one another. This is how they are to bear fruit.

Today's gospel gives us two models of personal relationship to Jesus: as a servant or as a friend. At any given point in our faith journey one of these two models is dominant. Either we see our relationship to Christ mainly in terms of master-servant or in terms of friend-friend. With the exception of mystics, traditional lay spirituality in the church has usually followed the master-servant model. Jesus is seen more as a master to be feared, respected and obeyed than as a friend to love in intimacy and familiarity. Today's gospel challenges us

to rethink our relationship with Christ because, evidently, Christ himself prefers to relate with his disciples as friend to friend rather than as master to servant. He tells them at the Last Supper: "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". Jesus says that he would no longer call his disciples servants. This seems to indicate that he called them servants until then. Our relationship with Christ goes through different stages. First it starts off as a master-servant relationship when we are new to the faith, but then as our relationship with Christ deepens it changes into a less formal friend-friend type of relationship. Today's gospel is a call for us to move beyond the infant stage, the servant-master relationship, and go over to the adult stage, the friend-friend way of relating to Christ. This will change the way we pray and the way we live and to experience more peace and joy in our lives, as people do who are in love.

While calling us to this new relationship of friendship, Jesus tells us that we all are fit to come to his level of relationship as friends. In this friendship the first choice is his as it is ours and he has found us worthy of this choice. He reminds us that we did not choose him but Jesus chose us first and he has decided to choose us in our unworthiness and to love and accept us as we are. These words of Christ, you did not choose me, but I chose you, apply to each one of us, we who believe in him, the Saviour of the world. Whether it is by our priesthood or by our baptism and our confirmation in Christ, each one of us was chosen by the Son of God to be an adoptive son of the Father in the Spirit. Each one of us has a mission to fulfil: that of spreading forth the Love of God throughout the world for the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is God who chooses us and makes us worthy of his love which is a great privilege placed on to us. We must know that God loves us and accepts us as we are, but God loves us too much to leave us as we are. We love babies as they are, yet we want them to grow up. God expects us, similarly, to grow in his love. The Lord's offer to us of friendship and intimacy with him should not be an excuse for callousness and indifference. Just as God showed his love for us in deed by sending his Son to die for us, so is true love for God always shown in deed by the way we keep the twin commandments of love of God and neighbour. This demand he makes of us to tell us that if we are truly the friends of Jesus we must do as he commands us to do. That is the close bond of friendship relationship.

In his friendship towards us Jesus has made known to us everything that He has heard from the Father. Through the revelation that was made complete in Jesus, God gave endlessly to us. Jesus goes further to tell us that it has been his initiative to choose his disciples. We did not choose Jesus. He chose us. We do not have the capability of drawing towards God. It is by the grace of the Father that we are drawn to Jesus. It is God the Father calling us, telling us through His Spirit, "Jesus is the answer. Go to Him." God created us to love; He created us so that we might all love each other with only one heart, one soul. God created us so that, one day, we might receive within us his Son Jesus, and, through Him, all the Love he is in person as God, the Son and Image of the Father. Later in his discourse Jesus thanks the Father for choosing the disciples and giving them to him to be with him. There is no contradiction here because of the mutuality of the relationship, for Jesus and the Father are one. This choice is made through the power of the Holy Spirit and therefore we are being transformed in the likeness of Christ. Through the power of love, we are being made holy so we may shine towards others in the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The entire gospel passage and the second reading speaks to us of God's love for us and the first reading tells us that God's love has no partiality. One can describe love as something unique which reaches out to others without expecting anything in return. Such is the love of God for his creation. God's love is poured out in abundance on every single creature and it continues to flow out whether there is a response or not. This is the love which the father in the story of the Prodigal Son shows to the wayward son who has gone far away and wasted all his father's gifts on a wasteful life. It may sometimes shock us that the love of God for the most generous and virtuous person and for the most immoral person we can think of is exactly the same. This is because God is love and by his very nature he cannot stop loving. The love is complete when the other person responds and becomes mutual. Yet God does not stop loving every one. It is this love that enables us to love our enemies and want to be reconciled with them. Therefore, John says today that wherever there is love, there is God. This love goes beyond cast creed and religion. If we really love our brothers and sisters, including strangers and even enemies, we do not have to worry if we love God. Wherever there is a person filled with real love for others, God is present there. In celebrating the Eucharist today, let us ask Mary, the Mother of Jesus, to teach us how to know and to love Jesus. May Mary make us Apostles of Love, for the Glory of the Father.

It was during the Korean War in 1954. There were the American Soldiers fighting the war in Korea and it was hard. It was the cold winter and the war had moved to the forest area and the Americans became the target. There was knee deep snow and in that situation 43 American Soldiers were captured and were put in a small hut. They had no fire to warm them and did not have sufficient clothes to protect them from severe cold. Only way to warm them was huddling themselves and the body heat would keep them alive. In the group were two persons were sick with diarrhea and it was not pleasant to have them in the group. Then one soldier got up, picked one of the sick persons and put him outside the door and came back to pick the other and kept him outside the door. Both died instantly. No one said anything. The war was over and the forty one were rescued. Someone told of the episode and there was the psychological court martial. There was one accused and forty witnesses. They were asked the same three questions: did you see what was happening and all answered and said they did see it all. Second was they knew what would happen and all said that they knew of instant death. The final question asked was why you didn't do anything and each answered the same way: it was none of my business. The other is not my business.

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