

6th Sunday of Easter 2015 B Cycle

Acts 10:5-26 *God shows no partiality – the gift of the Holy Spirit is poured out on the Gentiles*

Psalm 98 *"The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power."*

1 John 4:7-10 *Beloved, since God has loved us so much, let us love one another.*

John 15:9-17 *I call you friends because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father*

Love one another as I have loved you. Care for each other. I have cared for you.
Bear each other's burdens. Bind each other's wounds; and so you will know my return.

That hymn sets the beautiful words of today's Gospel to music: *"This is my commandment: Love one another as I love you."* That is not just what Jesus said long ago to his *first* disciples, it is a truth of the faith that we share - Jesus loves you & me right here, right now! And he calls us, his disciples in the 21st century, to love each other the way he loves us.

The 2nd reading makes it very clear that we cannot live the first part of that command - *"love one another"* - without really hearing the last part *"as I love you."*

The very first word in that reading is "Beloved." That is the word that the Holy Spirit puts on the pen of the one who writes to us in this letter. That is how the Spirit of Jesus names us.

It is the same word that he hears from his Father. That very word is repeated 6 times in the 1st letter of John. The last sentence of the reading today says it even more directly: *"This is what God's love is: not that we have loved God, but that God has loved us and sent his Son for the forgiveness of our sins."* Those words remind me of what I have heard Friar Richard Rohr say, "God doesn't love you because you are good. You are good because God loves you.

The command to love one another is first of all a command to love the ones closest to you. It is a call to love our mothers, not only today, on Mothers' Day, but every day. It is a call to love the ones you came here with today.

Take a look around you. Look at some of the ones you are called to love. Is it always easy? I don't think so. It can be hard work to love the ones who are closest to you - your spouse, your children, your in-laws, your aging parents, other members of your parish. I may not always feel like loving.

When that is true, I recall words I have heard and said when I was on teams to lead Marriage Encounter weekends: love is more than a feeling, *Love is a decision.* I have seen many marriages renewed or even saved when spouses made a decision to love, in spite of overwhelming difficulties.

And it can be even harder to love the "one another" that looks out at me from the mirror. It is important sometimes to remember that **I** am one of the "one anothers" that Jesus commands me to love.

But the command goes even further. The 1st reading is evidence of that. Cornelius is someone that the Jews of Peter's time would consider "other" - different, outside of their group. He and his family were *Gentiles*, not part of the culture or religious tradition of the Jewish people. Yet, we hear in this reading, "God shows no partiality. .. whoever ... acts uprightly is acceptable to God."

The context of this statement is the whole of chapter 10 of the Acts, where we hear the story of how Peter had a vision in which an angel says to him, "*What God has made clean, you are not to call unclean.*" The lectionary has a few verses from that chapter, but the whole chapter is worth reading, since it is the story of the event that began the process that has welcomed almost all of us here into the community of Christians.

In our own time, we could translate the verse to "What God has accepted you are not to reject" and understand that we are not to treat as "*other*" someone that God loves. I have even heard it said this way, we are not to "other" someone - to ostracize or shun them - just because they speak a different language, come from a different culture, have a different sexual orientation or a different colored skin. Yet, we do that sometimes. My grandparents on both sides were "*othered*" because they spoke Italian on my mother's side and Lithuanian on my father's.

Creation itself is sometimes treated as "other" - as if we humans were not part of it. This too often leads to activities that destroy the land, the air and the water for the sake of profit, with no regard for the way this affects everyone, especially the most vulnerable among us.

We see some of the results of neglecting to love all of creation in the rapid extinction of species, dangerous & rapid climate change, mining and drilling practices that harm the land, the water and the people who live in the area and even some so called "natural" disasters, many of which are caused by human neglect or greed. Pope John Paul, Pope Benedict and Pope Francis have all reminded us of God's call to care for the natural world.

Jesus has entered into relationship with the whole of creation, taking on the earthly elements that make up our bodies. By the fluids & chemicals in his body and his very DNA, Jesus is connected with all creatures, not only human beings.

St. Francis got that point, and called all creatures his brothers & sisters. The point is that we are called to love not only our human sisters & brothers, but all of creation. They are among the "*one anothers*" that Jesus calls us to love.

That has not yet happened globally or even nationally, possibly because we are not yet really conscious that **we** are part of a web of creation and that what we do *for* or to *all* creatures affects our lives and the lives of the most vulnerable. To love one another as Jesus loves means to respect all life - the lives of the unborn, the dying, the different and the life that is part of the earth itself.

How can we live the command to Love one another as Jesus loves us in our day to day lives?

First, by growing in intimacy with Jesus. This intimacy is described beautifully in the Gospel passage for today, *"I call you friends because I have told you everything I learned from my Father."* That is the true meaning of all intimacy - to share who you really are with someone else.

We grow in intimacy with Jesus by taking time in prayer and reading his Word, and by sharing our faith with each other - not only at Mass but in conversation. You could read the Sunday readings before you go to Mass, and even talk about what they mean to you, and listen to what they mean to someone you know. This simple act can have life changing results.

There is a group of lay men & women in Italy called the *Sant'Egidio* community. It began when they were teen agers in the 1960's. They decided to take seriously what the 2nd Vatican Council told them to do. They read the Gospels together & began to do what Jesus said in their everyday life & in their own neighborhoods. They are still gathering to pray every evening. They feed the hungry and reach out to serve people who are in need. Through their example, people all over the world have been inspired to do the same.

Second, we live the command of Jesus when we make a decision to love. Not only those closest to us, but even creation itself; not only our friends and those who are like us, but those who are different and even our enemies. That decision could put us in opposition to a culture which Pope Francis describes as a culture of acquisition and consumption - a culture of getting rather than giving, but it is a choice to be **in** the world without being **of** the world.

Finally, we love as Jesus loves when we let Jesus be the judge, the one who forgives - the one who sees with compassion. I often pray this way: *Jesus be **my** judge; Jesus be **their** judge (and you know who "they" are).* To truly live the command of Jesus, we need to see creation, each other and all life as sacred. That is how St. Francis put it in his great canticle of creatures:

*♪♪ Sacred the land, sacred the water, sacred the sky holy and true.
Sacred all life, sacred each other, all reflect God who is good. ♪♪*