

SIXTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER

YEAR B



Prayer

Psalm 98:1-4

O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.

The LORD has made known his victory; he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.

He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

Reading the Word

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal."

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone

who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

1 John 4:7-10

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

FIRST READING

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

PSALM

Psalm 98:1-4

SECOND READING

1 John 4:7-10

GOSPEL

John 15:9-17

John 15:9-17

Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. 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, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

*Scripture quotations from
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Hearing the Word

“Immersed in God’s Love”

Today’s liturgy continues a sequence of readings which began on the second Sunday of Easter. The dominant themes in this sequence are that of discipleship and love, interwoven with, and grounded in, the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection. Today, these themes converge in the single central theme of God’s gratuitous love for the people, manifested through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Thus this Sunday brings the entire message of Easter to its climactic conclusion.

In the continuing readings from the Acts of the Apostles, attention shifts back from Paul to Peter. Acts ch.10 presents the conclusion of the Apostle’s mission presented in this book. While praying, Peter had a strange vision, inviting him to consume types of food which a faithful Jew was not even allowed to touch (Acts 10:9-17). Another man, Cornelius, also had a vision, advising him to invite Peter to his household (Acts 10:1-6). Cornelius was a Roman dignitary living in the prosperous coastal city of Caesarea. The text describes him as a “devout man who feared God” (Acts 10:2). Even though not a Jew, Cornelius searched for the one true God, with the sincere intention of serving him. Neither man understood what these visions meant at the time, but they acted upon them. Cornelius sent for Peter who accepted the invitation. He entered Cornelius’ house,

even though, as a pious Jew, he was not supposed to do so (see Act 10:28). Meeting Cornelius and hearing his story, Peter understood the meaning of his puzzling vision. He realized “that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him”. These words disclose God’s intention, to bring the Gentiles into the family of the Church. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the baptism of Cornelius’ household by Peter meant that these Gentiles became full members of the community of believers.

At its inception, the first Christian community in Jerusalem was entirely Jewish. However, Peter’s mission in Acts concludes with the opening of the Church’s doors to the Gentiles. In response to God’s revelation they can now officially and fully become “God’s people”. Peter’s insight, and his actions, represent a rising above the distinctions of “clean and unclean”, and “Jew and Gentile”. This, in turn, reveals God’s decision to make salvation open to all, to make it a universal gift. This gift comes from God’s love, unrestricted by human distinctions, divisions and boundaries. God’s love is the impartial love of the creator who desires salvation for all his creatures.

Continuing the reading from 1 John takes the reader to the heart of this letter, to the core and most profound insight about God found in the NT – “God is love”. This statement is not merely a theological

formula or a figure of speech. Standing at the center of today’s passage, it provides the “center of gravity” for the entire letter. Its meaning and significance are explained by the surrounding verses. The author precedes this statement with the exhortation to love one another, directed to the members of the community. Thus, “God is love”, provides the reason and motivation for the mutual love expected from the community members. Their life is to be the life of love, because God loves, and God expects this love to be reciprocated by those who belong to him. To respond to one another, and to God, through love, means to know God.

The author follows the central assertion, “God is love” by pointing out that God’s love is not a theory; and he illustrates what love means. Thus, God’s love expresses itself in the self-giving act of his Son’s self-sacrifice on the cross. The author emphasizes that God was not compelled to act in this manner, the people did nothing to merit God’s love. God acted gratuitously, expecting nothing in return and having only salvation in view. God’s love expressed itself through the self-sacrifice of Christ, who acted in accordance with God’s will and purpose (see John 3:16). Jesus offered himself on the cross, so that, free from sin, believers might receive the gift of salvation, the gift of life. The self-sacrifice of God through Jesus constitutes the supreme expression and measure of what love means.

Today's Gospel passage builds on the teaching of unity between God, Jesus, and believers from the last Sunday, where it was described through the concept of mutual "abiding". Today's passage specifies what makes such mutual abiding possible – the force of love. In a memorable phrase, Jesus states, "as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love". Love functions as the force that binds God to people, and heaven to earth, through Jesus as its channel. This is the "the vertical dimension of love".

The same love has its "horizontal dimension". The love that links God and people needs to bind the people here on earth. Hence, Jesus speaks of the commandment of love. This single commandment contains, and fulfils, all the other commandments (see Rom 13:8; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8). Jesus further specifies what love means by referring to the same self-sacrificial love that the author of 1 John identified as God's own way of loving. Jesus sets himself as an example in the words, "love one another as I have loved you". After the resurrection, the disciples knew full well that these words pointed to Jesus' cross as the example of supreme love, of, "laying down one's life for one's friends". However, they would have also thought about Jesus washing their feet during the last supper (see John 13:12-17). As his friends, chosen and loved by him, they were obliged to practice the same sacrifi-

cial service. In fact, they were chosen for this very purpose – to bring divine-like love into the world, thus bearing the fruit of the love they themselves experienced.

The readings of the sixth Sunday of Easter conclude a significant part of this season. They reveal that Jesus' resurrection constitutes the fulfilment of God's decision to bring salvation to all humanity. Peter's actions in the house of Cornelius demonstrated this very clearly. Salvation is universally available to those who, through faith in Jesus and reception of the Holy Spirit, choose to accept it. The second reading reveals the deepest reason for God's gratuitous offer of salvation. Having created the world, God is not a distant and disinterested creator, but a loving Savior who, acting through Jesus, restores to humanity the life threatened by sin. The Gospel reading brings all these thoughts together, focusing on the believers' response to the loving God's offer of salvation. Believers are invited to abide in God through Jesus, and to bring God's love into the world by extending it to one another. Living in love means belonging to God, and such union leads to salvation, to eternal life. The Christian life of love demonstrates that God's love effectively bore its fruit, that it has brought about life. At the beginning of time God created the world by his word. Through Jesus, the fullest expression of God's self-sacrificial love, God has re-created the fallen world.

Living a life of God-like love, the believers show that God's love has prevailed. Indeed, they make true the words of the Psalmist, "all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God".

Listening to the Word of God

Rose Hartwick Thorpe in the year 1867 wrote a narrative poem entitled, "Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight". This poem is set in the 1600 during the English civil war. It tells the sad story of a young and beautiful woman called Bessie whose lover Basil had been captured by the Puritans and thrown into prison. The judge sentenced Basil to be shot that night when the curfew bell rings.

The young woman sought to seek pardon from Oliver Cromwell, the English military and political leader during the English Civil War. Knowing that Oliver Cromwell would be late in arriving, she begged the man who rings the bell not to ring the curfew bell. The old man refused. However, Bessie, not wanting to see her lover die, heroically climbed to the top of the bell tower. She clasped the bell and manually prevented it from ringing. Hanging between heaven and earth, risking her life and being bruised in the process, she delayed the intended execution.

When Cromwell finally arrived, she fell at his feet and with hands and body bruised and torn, she pleaded for clemency. Seeing the depth of love and courage exhibited by this woman, Cromwell was so touched that he

immediately issued a pardon for Basil.

There is an Ethiopian proverb which says: "When one is in love, a cliff becomes a meadow." The narrative poem of Rose Hartwick, when applied to our faith, helps us understand the immeasurable love of God expressed to us in and through the person of Jesus Christ. Yes, we have been immersed in the love of God.

In a discussion with a priest-friend of mine, I asked him, "How do we preach the Gospel anew to Christians who are hurting and are experiencing so much evil in their lives?" He paused for a moment, gave a sigh and said, "In every discourse about God, the first premise should always be: God is love." For a moment I thought he had evaded my question but upon a deeper reflection, I realised that he had spoken a word of wisdom to my spirit. I call it a word of wisdom because it opened my eyes to understand that even in pain and hurt, we can be sure that the love of God is available for us. Sometimes in life, we focus so much on how people are not loving us enough and in the process we fail to see how immeasurable is the love of God for us. There is a Tunisian proverb which says: "If the full moon loves you, why worry about the stars". The love of God for each one of us is so big that nothing can be compared to it. Look deep into your own life and you will find many instances when you were immersed in the love of God.

Another priest friend chose the quote of St. Alphonsus Liguori, "I cannot live unless to prove some love for such unmeasured love" for his ordination souvenir card. His reason? According to him, on two different occasions, he nearly got drowned at sea. In both cases, he prayed at the point of death and he miraculously survived. In another instance, he was ambushed by armed robbers. Again, he prayed and God rescued him from the robbers, unharmed. Having experienced these manifestations of God's love, he felt he could not live unless to prove some love for such unmeasured love. Consequently, he responded to God's call to serve as a priest. When we too have experienced an immersion in the love of God, we must express it in our dealings with others. We have been loved to love. The text of 1 John 4:7 exhorts us: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God." In calling to mind the love of God, we are called to commit ourselves to loving others as well.

Proverb

"If the full moon loves you, why worry about the stars."

Action

Self-examination

I sit quietly and call to mind instances when I felt the love of God. On what occasions did I experience it?

I ponder over events in my life when love lifted me up. What were they?

Response to God

I allow my heart to well up with gratitude to God for such immeasurable love freely offered to us in and through the person of his Son Jesus. I express my gratitude in words of praise and thanksgiving.

Response to your World

I will consider an action of love that someone can feel and experience as God's love. I will perform it.

What do our group need to do to make an individual or a community around us feel loved?

Prayer

Eternal Father, in giving us your Son Jesus Christ, you have proved beyond doubt that your love is deep and eternal.

As you immerse us in your ocean of love, may we be renewed and empowered to love all those we encounter daily.

Grant this through Christ our Lord.

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