

Reflections on the Commandment to Love

The Bible Readings on this Sixth Sunday of Easter are from Acts 10:25-2,34-35, 44-48; 1 John 4:7-10; John 15:9-17; and our Song of Praise is Psalm 98. Our major lesson from last Sunday is that we remain in Christ Jesus in order to bear lasting fruit. Our reflection this weekend stems from a continuation of that conversation, this time on the commandment to love one another.

An understanding of God's love would be a rich knowledge that everyone should have, and that would make the greatest difference. God's love for humanity is mysterious as well as overwhelming. It does not obey human laws or our thinking, because God's ways are different from ours, according to the Prophet Isaiah, (cf. Is. 55:8-9). We are taught that God's love is unconditional and everlasting. In Acts 10:34 today we read that God shows no partiality. Here we visualize the nature of God. No wonder in every nation, age or creed whoever fears God and acts uprightly is acceptable to him. The new religion Peter found himself as leading, exposed him to break from the religious barriers in his former religion, Judaism. Entering a Gentile house forbidden in Judaism, and led by the Spirit, he ordered for the baptism of all in the name of Jesus. This is the New Way, the way of Christianity. **Notice where the baptisms took place, probably at Cornelius house.** What does this action say of arguments we hold with some denominations about baptism in the river only, which creates barriers for Christian evangelization instead of finding and creating common grounds to encourage Christian unity of purpose for which Christ prayed, (cf. John 17). We must allow our actions in the Spirit to benefit Christianity and not just denominations for self-interest of the conflict denominations. The Lord Jesus while discoursing with Nicodemus says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." (John 3:16). Jesus came to save souls and not to create more burdens for us, but to free us.

In this weekend's Gospel the Lord Jesus said: "As the Father loves me, so I also loved you. Remain in my love." (John 15:9). In this passage, the Lord has commanded us to love one another as he himself loves us. Do we understand the word "love" as it is used with so many connotations? There is much to say about love of God and love of neighbor. The Lord Jesus said that there is no greater love than one to lay down one's life for one's friends. Love, therefore, connotes sacrifice, suffering, self-giving. There is filial love and carnal love. Our love for God is filial, which has to do with reverence, trust, respect, worship, etc. Love of neighbor would also involve respect, trust, self-sacrifice, self-giving, etc. We give ourselves to others for their survival, sustenance, respect for human dignity, etc. **Sacrificial love is dying to oneself that others might have life. Example, parents and leaders often give their lives for the survival of their children, their subjects and humanity. Reflect on how this happens, how you die daily and every so often that others may live. That is the love we are reflecting on.** If you understand this, that is what the Lord is calling you to do for humanity. Carnal love, on the other hand, is that which exists in relationship between man and woman, giving rise to the making of babies, to grow the human family. That is not our topic here surely.

Following last week's condition for bearing much fruit, the Lord today calls us to remain in his love. The Second Reading says that if we want to imitate God in his love, we should begin by loving one another, since love is from God (cf. 1 John 4:7-10). Genuine Christian love demands level-headedness, doing the right thing in the family or place of work, and always place oneself in others' shoes that you may judge and act rightly. Pentecost experience is the one thing that

disposes people to be like God in loving. Unfortunately, some of us seem not to have Pentecost experience, as was described in Acts 2, Acts 10 and Acts 19. The good news is that this experience is for all who fear God. Many of us have experienced it. In well-organized prayer meetings, people also share similar experiences. Our friendship with God has brought us freedom, as opposed to slavery. Jesus the good shepherd tells us that if the Son sets us free, we are free indeed, because his coming is that we might have abundant life (cf. John 10:10b). God wants all people to be saved, whether children or adults, rich or poor, slaves or free persons. When we talk of God's love, it is that he loves us, "not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10). In baptism we receive the Spirit of adoption as children of God, infants and adults alike. The Spirit is the love of God, and all who are open to him in expectant faith would receive life and the manifestations of the Spirit. Religious experience is necessary to solidify our faith and love. We need to grow in spiritual disposition. You may need someone to help you discover or name your experience. A spiritual director helps you with this when you go for religious consultation, spiritual counselling, or spiritual advice, etc.