

Seventh Sunday of Easter – Ascension/May 16, 2021

We Are One in God: A Letter to Me

I'm confident that all of us from time to time can hear the whisper of the Holy Spirit guiding and teaching us --- some may refer to it as listening to their conscience, while others may say it's their guardian angel. St. Catherine of Laboure once said that during prayer, she "tells God everything that is in her heart . . . my pains and my joys and then I listen (and) if you listen, God will also speak to you." I wholeheartedly believe this.

I experienced one of these moments recently. Some of you may know that I started a Facebook page to share my sermons and glimpses of parish celebrations like weddings and baptisms with our community. I hoped it would be an effective way of bringing Jesus into the lives of a greater number of people, and it has been. A few weeks ago, I received a handful of friend requests from people from distant parts of the world --- countries in Africa, Asia and South America. Before accepting their requests, I checked their profiles as my wife and daughters had taught me to do, to be as sure as I could be that their intentions were sincere --- and they did seem to be sincere. So, I clicked accept. Within only a few minutes I received dozens of new friend requests and instant messages from my new Facebook friends from all over the world, and the more I accepted, the faster they came --- it seemed like a dam had broken. I thought, what have I done? I can't possibly respond to all of these people --- I've made a huge mistake! So, I put my phone down, and started my morning prayers. As I opened up my book of daily reflections to that day, April 26th, I read this passage, "If on any particular day we do nothing more than give a little joy to a neighbor, that day will not be wasted. For we have succeeded in giving comfort to an immortal soul." --- Blessed Contardo Ferrini

I finished my prayers, picked up my phone, and started responding to as many of them as I could. Almost without exception, these were people who lacked many of the comforts of life which we take for granted, and what was obvious to see, was the vast majority of them were seeking one thing above all else, companionship, especially Christian companionship.

In today's second reading, St. John teaches, "if God so loved us, we also must love one another . . . (and) if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us." So many people are asking or are searching for the presence of God --- the peace and contentment which come from knowing that we are not alone and that we matter. And, within our busy lives, if we are able, even for only a few moments, to share a little bit of ourselves, a little bit of our love with others, we have shared God Himself with those who need

Him. This is the hunger which I could sense when I saw the photos and read the words of many of my distant Facebook friends.

In today's Gospel, while interceding on behalf of His disciples, Jesus prays, "Holy Father, keep them in your name . . . so that they may be one just as we are one." This is not only a prayer for that moment ---it's a prayer for today, and tomorrow, especially when the world faces great conflict and danger. Jesus tells us that being His disciple means we will not be free of anxiety and worry, but that we will receive the protection of God during struggles with sin and evil. And, during these struggles, part of God's protection will be the love and support which we can provide each other, the knowledge that we are not alone, that each of us matter to someone, even if that someone may live half a world away.

Today's scripture passages and the hunger for companionship of my Facebook friends also teach us how precious our personal relationships are, despite the inevitable bumps we encounter along the way. I experienced a few of these bumps during a conversation with someone I love recently, and as I sometimes do, I pouted for a few days to make a point that I'd been offended. Then, I began to pray over my feelings until, finally, I was inspired to write something down. In the spirit of St. Catherine of Laboure, I believe these words were the whisper of our Lord speaking to me, I wrote ---

"Oh, why do you take offense so quickly, tender heart? Is it because your peace and solitude have been broken for only a moment? Think about those who are in pain and suffering with no one to love them --- without a moment of consoling peace. This pain you feel brings you back to the world, to help you to know the hurt and loneliness which others experience far too often. Who promised you a life without pain or sorrow? It wasn't Me, your Lord. Rather, I asked you to follow me and bear your crosses well, and if you would, I promised you eternal life!

Our Lord speaks with all of us. Let us be prepared to listen.

May our Savior Jesus give you His peace!

Deacon Roger Vierra