

# *Gratitude Foundation*

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*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?  
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

## **Sixth Sunday of Easter—Year B**

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*“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*

(1 Thess: 5:18)

# Sixth Sunday of Easter

## Reading 1

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

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and, falling at his feet, paid him homage. Peter, however, raised him up, saying, "Get up. I myself am also a human being."

Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him."

While Peter was still speaking these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word. The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles also, for they could hear them speaking in tongues and glorifying God. Then Peter responded, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?" He ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

## Responsorial Psalm

**Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4**

R. (cf. 2b) **The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.**  
Sing to the LORD a new song,  
for he has done wondrous deeds;  
His right hand has won victory for him,  
his holy arm.  
R. **The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.**

The LORD has made his salvation known:  
in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.  
He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness  
toward the house of Israel.

R. **The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.**

All the ends of the earth have seen  
the salvation by our God.  
Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;  
break into song; sing praise.  
**R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.**

## **Reading 2**

### **1 John 4:7-10**

Beloved, let us love one another,  
because love is of God;  
everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.  
Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.  
In this way the love of God was revealed to us:  
God sent his only Son into the world  
so that we might have life through him.  
In this is love:  
not that we have loved God, but that he loved us  
and sent his Son as expiation for our sins.

## **Alleluia**

### **John 14:23**

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord,  
and my Father will love him and we will come to him.

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

## **Gospel**

### **John 15:9-17**

Jesus said to his disciples:

"As the Father loves me, so I also love you.

Remain in my love.

If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love,  
just as I have kept my Father's commandments  
and remain in his love.

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you  
and your joy might be complete.

This is my commandment: love one another as I love 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 no longer call you slaves,  
because a slave does not know what his master is doing.

I have called you friends,  
because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.

It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you  
and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain,  
so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you.

This I command you: love one another."

## Exegesis

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

Our Scripture passage from the *Acts of the Apostles* is preceded by the *Vision of Cornelius* (10:1-8) and the *Vision of Peter* (10:9-16). Cornelius was a Centurian, a Roman soldier with authority. We are also told that he was a devout God-fearing man. The Roman historian Josephus writes of many Gentiles such as Cornelius who participated in the ritual life of the Jewish people including observance of prayer hours and synagogue services yet lacked full membership as they remained uncircumcised. The vision of Cornelius occurs during the 3 p.m. prayer hour. The vision is simply to reach out to Peter and invite him to his home.

Peter's vision occurs the next day during the noon prayer hour. Jewish people saw themselves as the chosen people, e.g. "I will be your God and you will be my people." As such they had developed over the centuries a separatist attitude. They believed that it was important to avoid all that was not made clean by God. They struggled to avoid "contamination" from unclean people and places. Peter is assured in his vision that God has made all his creation clean.

The vision of Cornelius, the vision of Peter and the events that follow reveal the truth that it is God's will to draw all of humanity to Himself. In the words of Peter, "In truth I see that God shows no partiality." (10:34) A few days later Peter was back in Jerusalem and recounted the experience in detail to the Church. "When they heard this, they stopped objecting and glorified God, saying, 'God has granted life-giving repentance to Gentiles, too.'" (11:18)

Our first reading today therefore highlights the universality of God's love and God's initiative in delivering His love. It also reveals the power of the Holy Spirit pouring out indiscriminately upon humanity. The font of God's love and God's life are flowing upon all. The only question is, are we open to receive it?

### Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

Psalm 98 is referred to as an enthronement psalm that was used in synagogue liturgies. It is calling the people to gratitude and praise for the saving deeds of Yahweh. It includes the call for all humanity to join in joyful worship and for all creation to acknowledge Yahweh's rule.<sup>1</sup> The saving power of God is clear for all to see and it elicits our response.

The psalm speaks of God's steadfast love (*hesed*) and fidelity (*emuna*). The steadfast love and fidelity of God is immutable. God is love, God is steadfast and faithful, God is Truth, and God cannot be untrue or unfaithful to His nature. This is Truth. Scripture often describes this Truth with the image of God as rock, e.g.: "I love you Lord, my strength, Lord, my Rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my God, my Rock of refuge." (Ps 18:2), "Be my Rock and refuge, my secure stronghold; for you are my Rock and fortress." (Ps 71:3)

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1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, P.H., page 543.

## Exegesis (Continued)

### 1 John 4:7-10

This pericope is often entitled *God's love and the Christian Life*. It is followed by a section entitled *We Know God's Love through the Spirit* (1 Jn 4:16-16a) and *Our Confidence: Abiding in God's Love*. (1 Jn 4:16b-21)

God IS Love. Like the reality that God is Being, or that God is Light, or God is Truth, or God is the Way, this concept describes a reality that is difficult to grasp with finite minds. Perhaps only enlightened by the Holy Spirit can we grasp this profound concept. God is the beginning, the *arche*, the first principle, and through Him all things came into being. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before Him. In love he destined us for adoption to Himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of His will." (Eph 1:3-5) We are here because it is God's will. God does not want a world without you. None of us chose to be born. It is by God's choice that each one of us is blessed with the gift of life.

God is love. German Catholic Theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar once described the Holy Spirit as the whirl of love that bonds the Father and the Son, that cannot be contained and so bursts out into all of creation. God is love. Love makes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit one. God has no need of creation. God wills to share His love with creation. Love is therefore the sharing of life, divine life. "The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being." (Gen 2:7)

"God created man in His image, in the divine image He created him; male and female He created them." (Gen 1:27) If God is love, and we were created in God's image, then our purpose is love. To fulfill our divine ordained purpose is to love and allow God's love to be perfected in us.

God is authentic love (*agape*). Authentic love by its very nature is self-giving. In his first encyclical *God is Love* Pope Benedict XVI pointed to the cross and wrote, "This is where the definition of authentic love must begin." St. John writes in the verses that follow our scripture passage today: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and His love is brought to perfection in us." (1 Jn 4:11-12) We were created in God's image. If we love, we remain in God and God remains in us. God's love is brought to perfection in us. Perfection is fulfilling the purpose for which we were created, love. As the old song goes, "They will know we are Christians by our Love." When strangers see us do they see Christ?



## Exegesis (Continued)

### John 15:9-17

Our pericope today is the heart of the *Last Supper Discourse* and is a part of the beautiful *Vine and Branches* metaphor. The setting is the Last Supper. Jesus is sitting around the table with His disciples minus Judas. He has washed their feet, given them His Body and His Blood, and is now talking about the gift of the Holy Spirit and about abiding in His Love and about becoming fruit for the world.

There has been a gradual movement through the metaphor of the vine and branches, which introduced the theme of abiding (cf. vv. 4, 5a, 5b, 6, 7), into an insistence that to abide in Jesus means to abide in love (vv. 9-11). The disciples' abiding in the love of Jesus and keeping His commandments unites them with Jesus' response to the Father in whose love He abides, and whose commandments He keeps. Keeping the commandments of Jesus inserts the disciples into "the chain of love" (cf. Segovia, *Farewell* 148-163).<sup>2</sup> The decision to enter into and remain in this chain of love or not, is the difference between knowing and not knowing God, between believing and not believing. Ultimately it is the difference between life and death,

Verse 11 has always intrigued me. Jesus knows what lies ahead of Him. He is about to surrender Himself to the Crucifixion. And He says, "I tell you this so that My joy might be in you and your joy might be complete." Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The source is God. It is one of the fruits of abiding in God's self-giving love. True Joy can only be complete in the total emptying, the total gift of self. To abide in Christ, to put on the heart and the mind of Christ, given up, poured out on the Cross is the source of true and complete joy.

Verses 12-17 can be subdivided as follows:

1. *The commandment to love as Jesus Loved* (vv. 12-14). The disciples are to respond to the command of Jesus by loving one another unto death as Jesus loved them.
2. *Jesus' love has established a new relationship* (vv. 15-16). Jesus has given His life for His friends, and thus they are no longer servants but loved and chosen ones of Jesus.
3. *The commandment to love* (v. 17). It is as friends and no longer servants that the disciples are to love one another.<sup>3</sup>

To love as Jesus loved is being modeled for them in the washing of the feet and in His Body and Blood being given up on the Altar of the Cross. Jesus loves without limit, without counting the cost.

It is Jesus who is choosing them as friends. Jesus has demonstrated His love for His friend in the Lazarus story (Jn 11:3,11,36) Jesus was moved to the depth of His being, He wept for His friend, and raised him to life. The *Book of Wisdom* speaks of the wise as being friends of God. It is one of the gifts of *Sophia, Lady Wisdom* to enable us to become a friend of God. This friendship describes a loving, abiding, relationship with God.

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2. Moloney, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. Ed., *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina Series, Liturgical Press, p. 422.

3. Ibid., p. 424.

## Reflection

The Good News is contained in our second reading this weekend from the First Letter of St. John: “In this is love; not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as expiation for our sins.” (1 Jn 4:10) This is called the *Primacy of Grace*. Everything begins with God’s love. Everything is sustained in God’s love. All our lives must become a response to that love.

There is a dimension to authentic *agape* love that most are not cognizant of. There are no limits or bounds to authentic love. For very natural reasons we look at life through the lens of our finite minds. We are taught to believe that if we give something away, we no longer have it. Not so with Spiritual fruits and gifts such as love. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The gifts of the Spirit operate under a different law, a law that Bishop Barron refers to as Spiritual physics. The more love that each one of us gives away the more love that we have to give and the more love that there is in the world. The more joy that we bring into our environments the more joy that we experience and the more joy that there is in the world. The more peace that we give away the more peace that we experience and the more peaceful our world becomes. The same can be said of all the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. God is the source and God is infinite, and so His gifts are also infinite.

When the time was right the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. God sent His only Son into our world to deliver His love to us. From the Cross God poured His love and His life upon us. There is no greater love than this. Now Jesus is calling each one of us by name and choosing us to become the manifestation of His love. We are a part of God’s incarnational plan. The gifts are given indiscriminately to all who worthily seek them. God shows no partiality.

It is up to us to open our hearts in response to God’s love. It is up to us to remain connected to the source of love and to become a part of the love chain. Like a branch on the vine, we must allow God’s love and God’s life to flow through us that we might bear fruit for the world. Like the leaves that give off life-giving oxygen, like the fruit that nourishes the world, we are called to give life and to nurture our spiritually starving world. We are an important part of God’s plan. As far as I know, there is no backup plan. We are it!

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Your is Jesus and Mother Mary,





## Personal Witness

This month I celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. Invariably as I have prepared homilies over the years, I have spent many hours in prayer. I always begin that prayer by asking God what He wants me to say. I ask Him to give me His words that He might speak to the people through me. The result of that prayer is that much of my preaching has been proclaiming God's amazing love. I feel that God wants me to tell people how much He loves them and tell them often. He wants everyone to know that It was He who chose them and not they who chose Him. He wants people to know that He does not want a world without them.

I have always known that God loved me, at least at an intellectual level. In my early adult life, I must confess that I did not experience God's love in my life. Looking back, I now realize just how far I had drifted from God. There is a common adage in spiritual jargon that says, if you don't feel God in your life, guess who moved. I "moved" by simply being preoccupied with worldly pursuits. As I strayed further and further from God my heart became hardened. Over time I had placed a protective shield around my heart such that I was not letting God in, or anyone else for that matter, and in someways even myself. In that emptiness I found myself existing and not really living.

There was something missing in my life, and I didn't know what it was. I was starving for love, authentic love. A dear Christian friend of mine saw in me what I could not see. He encouraged me to attend a Cursillo Retreat weekend. With a lot of prayers and his persistence I begrudgingly attended. For the first time in many years, I turned to God with all my heart. In a moment of Grace, the shield around my heart melted, the Holy Spirit rushed in, and I felt the embrace of God's love as never before in my life. It was like my life changed from a black and white movie to reality in high-definition technicolor. My life was changed forever. God's love was once again abiding in me.

That experience led me to kneel before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. My faith and my life became vividly clear to me. The entirety of our Catholic Faith is True. The promise of eternal life is real. I knew at that moment that I was to become a priest. It was something that I had not seriously considered before. It was like God was revealing to me my true calling, my true purpose and even my true identity.

My first reaction was, "Why me?" I was really questioning my worthiness. I remained awake all night thinking of reasons why I had no business being a priest. The words of Peter kept echoing in my mind, "Depart from me Lord I am a sinful man." As the Spirit would have it the Gospel for this weekend was proclaimed at morning prayer. I heard Jesus talking directly to me, "It was not you who chose Me, but I who chose you." It was, still is, and always will be, the most humbling experience of my life. I heard the same words as Peter heard, "Come follow me."

Each one of us is being chosen, called, and sent by Jesus to bear fruit in our world. We are all a part of God's plan for the continued flow of His life and His love into creation. All things came into being and are sustained in being through Jesus, the Word made flesh. We are His body here on earth. He is the vine, and we are branches of that vine. Together we make up His Body, His Church. United to the source of all that is we are united to all that is. This is the common union that we call Communion, abiding in Christ, abiding in the love chain. "Come follow me."

In Christ,

