

## **Sixth Sunday of Easter B/2012**

The readings of this sixth Sunday of Easter talk about the love of God that is impossible without the love of our fellow humans. They invite us to make the concept of “love” the paradigm that defines our belonging to God and our relationship with one another.

The first reading describes one of the major incidents that have transformed the life of the Church in its beginning. As a matter of fact, it was taught by the Law of Moses that no Jews should have any relationship with the pagans. However, Peter will violate this principle and go to the house of Cornelius at the instruction of the Holy Spirit.

Once Peter entered Cornelius' home and started speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all who were listening to the word of Jesus he brought to them, although they were not yet baptized. That incident convinced Peter that God shows no partiality, but rather in any nation whoever acts uprightly is loved by him. As consequence, Peter baptized them all in the name of Jesus Christ.

The main idea that is behind this text is the understanding that God is the God of all the nations and of all the peoples. Therefore, he does not discriminate against anyone of those who look for him with sincerity and righteousness. In that perspective, each person, even a pagan, is important before God. What counts most, then, is not our social status or rank, but the fact of being God's creatures. If so, we should be always be respectful of others even when they do not share our faith. Another idea which is behind this text is the recognition that God loves everybody in the same way. His love transcends all the different barriers human beings erect in order to separate one from another.

This text helps us understand the stakes of today's Gospel as Jesus speaks of love in which we have to remain and which we have to show to one another. First of all, Jesus declares that, as the Father loves him, he loves us. Because, he loves us, he enjoins us to remain in his love. In order to remain in that love, we have to keep his commandments and to love one another as he loves us.

The reason why Jesus tells us all this is simply because he wants that his joy might be in us and our own joy might be complete. That joy, however, does not spare us to sacrifice our lives for others, because there is no greater love than to lay down his life for one's friends.

Jesus calls those who believe in him his friends, because he has told them everything he has received from his Father. Such people are not like slaves who do not know what their master is thinking about or is doing. Jesus finishes his speech by reminding us that the initiative of being disciples does not come from us, but rather from him. What he wants of us is that we remain in him and that we love one another.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first point I want to highlight is about the joy of being chosen. In fact, there is a joy in being chosen among many other people to be part of a group or a team. We see this fact evidenced when there is a competition, like that of American idols, Miss Universe or Dancing with the Stars, etc.

After the competitors have given so much, only a few are chosen as winners, while many others are left out. Anytime it happens that way, the winners jump for joy because they have been found worthy of a prize. Here, however, is the intriguing part. Those

who are so chosen win because of their performance, their skills or their beauty. There is nothing free; they earned it by the sweat of their brows.

When Jesus says that he has chosen us, it is not because of some merits we have displayed, but it is out of love. With the love given by Jesus, there is nothing to boast for; everything becomes a gift. That is our privilege, namely to be chosen out of love in order to be disciple.

Because we are chosen out of love, we have to replicate that love in our relationship with Jesus and with one another. Then, we understand why Jesus says, “Remain in my love”... “Love one another”.

In that perspective, it becomes clear that we are chosen in order to love. Our role, then, as disciples of Jesus is to love. We are not there in order to compete with one another; or to quarrel with one another; but rather in order to love. We are not called to discipleship in order to hate each other; but in order to love. That is the commandment we have received and we have to put into practice. By fulfilling it, we honor Jesus and by despising it, we dishonor Jesus.

The second point I want to highlight is about the joy of being a friend. In fact, to be a friend, especially when it is about someone important or famous, is a great privilege and an honor. What is interesting in today’s Gospel is that Jesus contrasts friendship with slavery. In this country, the concept “slave” evokes very negative things and a state of being that nobody would like to see again.

In truth, the relationship of slave-master was a painful one. For instance, a slave was more than a baby, submitted to the dictate of his master and whose main role was that of doing his will and the duty entrusted to him. Never could a master ask his opinion or expect him to give one when there was a problem. Unlike a slave, a friend is a confident and a trustworthy ally to whom someone can open his heart and talk about his plans and projects.

When Jesus says that he calls us his friends and not slaves, it means that he has put us in a relationship of confidence and trust. He has brought us into his intimacy because everything of what he heard from his Father, he has communicated to us. He has opened his heart to us and told us the whole truth about our salvation. In order to remain in that friendship just one thing is needed: obedience to Jesus’ commands. Perhaps that is the challenge we all have as Christians.

Let us pray, then, that the Lord may help us to love one another as he loves us. Let us ask him the courage to be obedient to his commandments. As we celebrate Mothers’ Day today, let us pray for all our mothers, dead and living, that the Lord be with them. To the dead may he give his eternal life and to the living his blessing. May God bless you all!

**Acts of Apostles 10: 25-26, 34-35, 44-48; 1 John 4: 7-10; John 15: 9-17**



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