

## **Sixth Sunday of Easter B/2015**

The readings of this sixth Sunday of Easter talk about the love of God. They show that the love of God cannot go without the love of our fellows. They invite us to love as God loves, without distinction and without discrimination.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles describes the entrance of the pagans into the Church. It illustrates the first contact of Peter with the gentiles as he was invited to enter the home of Cornelius. It expresses the impartiality of God by showing how, while Peter was still speaking to the members of Cornelius' household, the Holy Spirit descended on them as he did on the Apostles. It finally highlights the reception of baptism that Peter could not withhold once those people had already received the Holy Spirit.

What is behind this text is the idea that God belongs to all the nations and all the peoples of the earth. There is also the idea that the love of God is without limit and is destined for all who look for him in every nation. The last idea is related to the importance of the sacrament of baptism as the key that gives us access to the kingdom of God.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the love of God. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus assuring his disciples of his love for them in the same way that his Father loves him. Then, it reports his declaration about the keeping of his commandments as the way of remaining in his love. After that, it gives the reason why Jesus speaks that way to his disciples.

The Gospel highlights also the invitation of Jesus to his disciples that they love one another as he has loved them. After that, the Gospel reports the statement of Jesus in which he assures his disciples that they are his friends and not slaves because he has told them everything of what he has received from his Father. The Gospel ends with Jesus' declaration about the primacy of his choice of the disciples and the reason why he has done so.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about the love of God. In order to better understand the relevance of Jesus' thoughts, we need to clarify the use of the word "Love", because it is nowadays very confusing.

In fact, in the popular imagination and in the language of daily life, love is understood as a deep feeling that creates a strong affection and an attachment to people or things. As such it has to do with liking someone or something. Because it is a feeling, it is entirely out of our control. That is why people often say that she fell in love or he fell in love. In truth, we cannot choose our feeling for today or plan our feeling for tomorrow. It just happens to be that way.

When Jesus is talking about "love", it is not a feeling, but an act of the will, a decision and a commitment to act for the benefit of another, no matter how we feel for that individual. In that sense, love is a lasting attitude of the given power of God, which produces a relationship to God and to others.

The origin of love is in God because God is love. God who is love lives in intimate relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit. The closeness of that relationship makes that the Father loves the Son totally, completely and fully. The way the Father loves the Son is the way the Son loves his disciples, that is, totally, completely and fully.

The proof of the love of the Son for us lies in the fact that he did not hesitate to sacrifice his own life for the salvation of the world. That is why Jesus says that there is no greater love than that of laying down one's life for one's friends.

We, the disciples of Jesus, are his friends and not his slaves. In this country, the concept of "slavery" evokes very negative things and a state of being that nobody would like to see repeated again. Our national experience of slavery, as a country and individual, gives us an idea to better understand why Jesus treats his disciples as friends and not slaves.

That is why, when Jesus calls us his friends and not his slaves, it means that he has put us in a personal relationship of trust. He has brought us into his intimacy because everything of what he heard from his Father, he has communicated to us. Moreover, he has opened his heart to us and told us the whole truth that can lead us to eternal salvation.

The initiative to be friends did not come from us, but rather from Jesus, because it is he who first chose us. The reason why he chose us is that we go and bear fruit that remains so that whatever we ask the Father in his name he may give us. Another reason why he chose us is that we love him as he has loved us. That is why our primary responsibility is to love and not to hate. As disciples of Jesus, we are not there in order to compete or to quarrel with one another, but rather in order to love one another. That is our duty and our obligation.

In that sense, we understand why the love of God is demanding. In fact, the love of God requires of us the acceptance of some sacrifices and even of some deprivation in order to conform ourselves to the will of God. When we always want to please ourselves, regardless of God's Laws, we jeopardize our friendship with Jesus. As human love cannot stand any longer without some sacrifice, so is the love of God. It is for that reason that Jesus insists that we keep his commandments. Without an effort, on our part, of keeping his commandments, we cannot have true friendship with him, because true friends are those who observe some line of conduct toward one another so that their friendship may prosper.

Moreover, Jesus is happy when he sees us keeping his commandments, because that way, we show that we obey him and we love him. The same happiness is what Jesus wants for each one of us. That is the reason why he tells us all those things.

Finally, because Jesus loves us without any distinction, we too have to love one another regardless of nationality, origin, color of the skin or social status. In that way, our witness to the truth of the love of God will be strong when people will see that we love like Jesus. Given that to love like Jesus is challenging for us, let us ask him for the grace of the Holy Spirit so that we are obedient to his commands and fulfill his will in our life. As, we celebrate Mothers' Day, let us pray also for all our mothers, dead and living, that the Lord may be with them. To the dead may he give his eternal peace and to the living his protective care. May God bless you all!

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



Homily Date: May 10, 2015  
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Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)  
Document Name: 20150510homily.pdf