

May 5, 2024
6th Sunday of Easter
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 may 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.”

Background:

In last Sunday's Gospel Jesus used the image of a grapevine to describe his relationship with God and the disciples' relationship with him. The Gospel for this Sunday follows last week's directly. Here, the intimate nature of those same relationships is described as *agape* love and is contrasted to the one-sided relationship of the master and slave.

The Greek word for love here is not *eros*, the passionate love that seeks to possess, nor *philia*, the attachment of family relationships. Instead John uses the word *agape*. This is the only word he uses to describe the love of God, and it is used eight times in this text. Each time, the word is placed in the aorist tense which means that it refers to a particular act of love. This tense of the Greek verb indicates that John is not referring to God's timeless ever-present love that has been manifested continuously throughout history. The single unique expression of God's love that John is referring to is the Son's obedience to the Father in becoming present in the person of Jesus. John refers to God's call to accept this mission that was heard by Jesus and those present at his baptism. (Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, and Luke 3:22)

God's love, manifested in Jesus' acceptance of his mission of being one among us, is the foundation that characterizes our relationship with God. The focus is not on our love, but on God's love--a love that is an invitation to remain in the ever-present and eternal love of God. That relationship is maintained through Jesus' obedience to God's commandments. It is also found in the disciple who is willing to lay down his/her life for the other like the Good Shepherd. Faithfully living God's commandments is the way disciples recognize that they are remaining in the relationship to which they have been invited. Like the Gospel text from last Sunday, the disciples are reminded that their relationship with God is not just for itself but must bear fruit.

While the text does speak of maintaining one's relationship with God by being obedient, it is also not by maintaining one's relationship with the Hebrew community that one maintains this relationship. Instead John characterizes this relationship with God as inviting us into a friendship with Jesus. This relationship is not based in being part of a people, but a more personal relationship that also carries with it a personal willingness to lay down one's life for the other. This is not the responsibility of the community, but of each person as invited by God to share in this relationship.

Reflection Questions:

1. Recall some of your relationships. Which would you describe as being based in a love that might be described by the Greek words for love: *agape*, *philia*, or *eros*?
2. What blessings did you received from each of those relationships? What blessings did you bestow on the other(s)?

3. Do you remember times in your life when you felt chosen? (Perhaps to be part of a team, a role in a drama production, a position of leadership in an organization, etc.) Do you also remember times when you felt passed over?
4. Have you ever felt like you had become an adopted member of a family?
5. Can you recall occasions when you knew that you needed to die to some part of yourself, for your own wellbeing or that of another? Do you think of that occasion as an act of love?
6. What are some of the feelings that arise within you right now when you think of God's love for you?
7. Can you take some time now to talk to God about your experience of God's love for you, your desire to respond to God's love for you, or some other thought that arose from you as you read this Gospel text?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for May 5, 2024, the Sixth Sunday of Easter

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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."

Excerpts from Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; Psalm 98:1-4; 1 John 4:7-10; and John 15:9-17

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for May 5th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. On this Sixth Sunday of Easter, the Gospel from John picks up right where it left off last week in chapter 15. Several phrases from last week are repeated, and in particular instruction about love is added. Jesus tells his disciples, "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. Love one another as I love you." He also adds, "Go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. Keep my commandments. This I command you: love one another."

The other readings also have references to loving one another, and that God's love should be made known to all the nations, to the ends of the earth, and not withheld from anyone who is upright in the Lord. In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter says, "I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him." Then the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word. Psalm 98 sings out, "The Lord has made his salvation known. All the ends of the earth have seen it. Sing joyfully, all you lands." In the second reading, from his first letter, John writes, "Everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love." Jesus goes on to explain in more depth, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. I chose you, and I call you friends." John in the second reading confirms, "God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. He loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!