

# Homily for the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

May 5-6, 2018

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

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Women of a certain age may remember some things expected of us, back in the day. Going away by yourself? Well, then, is everything arranged to run smoothly in your absence? Meals cooked ahead? Check. Kids schedules sorted out? Check. Rides to sports or music lessons organized? Check.

I would go a step further. Lest any disaster befall me in traveling a long distance, I would leave a detailed love note for my family. Complete with instructions. My hopes and desires for everyone's future.

Isn't that what Jesus is doing in today's Gospel? In a sense, we could say it's his Last Will and Testament. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you...Abide in my love...This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you...You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit. Fruit that will last..." Jesus promises that living this commandment will bring us joy. Joy that will last.

Love is a word we hear a lot, isn't it? We love chocolate. Our new car. Spring (which may yet come this year). How can we really understand what Jesus meant when that word is so overworked?

"Love one another *as I have loved you.*" Wow! What a tall order! "As" is the hinge, but also the hitch. Love one another *as I have loved you!* That is the fruit we are asked to bear. Fruit that will last.

Even the Apostles didn't fully grasp the radical implications of Jesus' teaching, as our first reading indicates. The Jewish disciples were shocked to discover that God would not withhold the Holy Spirit—from the *unbaptized* Gentiles. Not in their wildest dreams would it have occurred to them that God's love would include the Gentiles! After all, wasn't any encounter with Gentiles strictly forbidden by their law? Their view of God was so small they couldn't imagine God's generosity. Or that the Gentiles might have anything to teach them. But the Spirit of God just blew through

all those differences. God's faithfulness has no limits and no favorites. No one is excluded from God's community.

Perhaps we might ask ourselves whom do we still exclude? Who is it that we can't imagine learning from? People of color? Women? Muslims? Refugees? Those who are poor? Disabled? Those of a different sexual orientation? Or opposing political views?

Does our faith in the Risen Christ help us to see every one as God's beloved child? To know that God loves everyone just as much as ourselves? Even those with whom we strongly disagree? Can we learn to accept them as God accepts us?

Someone once remarked that we can never understand the reign of God until we are willing to come face to face with all those we would exclude, on any basis, for whatever reason.

Love one another as I have loved you. We have been given Jesus' own Spirit to enable us to grow into loving as he did. Jesus whole life witnessed to the compassionate, healing, forgiving and inclusive love of our God. A love that upset the established order of doing things. Jesus invites us to love as God first loved us. With a love that is willing to risk. To hold nothing back. Even as did Arnaud Beltrame, the French policeman who gave his life to save others in a recent terror attack.

Most of us will never be asked to risk that much. But could we risk stepping outside of our comfort zone of exclusivity? Pope Francis, in his recent letter, *Rejoice and Be Glad*, said, "The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. For the Lord has chosen each one of us 'to be holy and blameless before him in love.' ...We are capable of loving with the Lord's unconditional love, because the risen Lord shares his powerful life with our fragile lives."

