

6th SUNDAY OF EASTER; Cycle – B; May 5th 2024
Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; 1John 4:7-10; John 15:9-17

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

St John's gospel and letters revolve around one word which is **LOVE**. Unlike in the synoptic gospels John uses the word love **57 times in his gospel and 46 times** in his short Letters. In the very beginning of his gospel John reveals the purpose of Incarnation in these words, **"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life"** (John 3:16). The last commandment of Jesus to his disciples at the Last Supper was, **"Love one another as I love you (John 15: 12)**. *In short, through the gospel and letters John shows us, how God loves the world; how God loves Jesus; how Jesus loves God and how Jesus loves man.* Last Sunday, through the imagery of vine and branches Jesus asked his disciples to remain with him always to produce good fruits. In today's gospel which is part of chapter 15 Jesus goes one more step further and asks them to remain in his love and develop a personal friendship with him by keeping his Commandments. In rabbinic law a disciple is always a step below the teacher. But Jesus calls his disciples, friends. It means they are equal to the teacher. In his reflection on the blessing of being God's friend, the author Roland Faley affirms: **"Friendship is one of life's greatest gifts. Because friendship is more than mere mutual acceptance; to be a friend means we have been chosen by another. Being chosen means the other has taken initiative to choose me."** That is why Jesus says in John 15, **"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you."** In today's short gospel passage that we have just listened to Jesus uses the word **love 8 times**.

John summarizes his gospel and the letters with two commandments of Jesus, **'Love of God and love of neighbor.'** They are the two sides of the same coin, in the sense that one without the other has no existence. In continuation of his letter chapter 4, John says, **"God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."** So it is clear from the writing of John that we have to see God in our brothers and sisters, though they may not be agreeable or pleasing to us. As John sees, if we have love in us God remains in us and if God remains in us we cannot hate our brother or sister. Mother Theresa makes it very clear that whenever she picked up a dying person from the street, she could see the face of Jesus in him/her.

Only John says, *“God is love.”* So it is clear that in the hearts where the evils of hatred, enmity, intolerance and unforgiving attitude exist, there God cannot live. It is true: **“When man loves man God is born in his heart; when man hates man God dies in his heart.”** If we observe the two commandments of Jesus, *‘Love your God with all your heart and soul and love your neighbor as you love yourself’* – we can simply ignore the rest of the commandments. For all other commandments then will fall automatically in place. If love is the basis of all our words and deeds, no one will be hurt by us. That is why St. Augustine says, *“Once and for all a short rule is laid down for you. Love and do what you will. If you keep silence, do it out of love; if you cry out, do it out of love; if you refrain from punishing, do it out of love. Let the root of love be with you. From such a root nothing but good can come.”*

The very foundation of Christianity is *love*. Among world religious leaders only Jesus has spoken so much on love; his words and deeds were motivated by genuine love for mankind. Only Jesus could go beyond all human set boundaries and command his followers, **“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”** Jesus showed it through his life and death on the cross which is the culmination of his love. In today’s gospel Jesus affirms to his disciples, **“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”** Indeed Jesus proved it through his life. Besides that he instituted the Eucharist so he could be with us till the end of the age.

The Christians are also known all over the world for their charitable work among all caste and creed of people. Unfortunately, the greatest gift of love God has given us through his Son is receding fast from our individuals, families and communities. It is good that occasionally we read the passage from the 1Corinthians 13:1-13 where Paul gives the qualities of genuine love. Paul says, **“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury; it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.”** If such love remains among the people, we don’t have to worry about terrorism, violence and abuses; if the couples keep such genuine love, no divorce is possible. St. Mother Theresa says, **“At the end of life, we are going to be judged on the basis of our love for one another.”** According to the Parable of the ‘Last Judgment’ we will be judged by God for what good or bad we have done to others. **If we could add a little joy to someone’s life by our kind words and deeds, no doubt, eternal life will be ours.**