

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 14:23

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord,
and my Father will love him and we will come to him.

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 15:9-17; L56B

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.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

The heartbeat of today’s gospel and of the second reading from 1 John is “love.” As disciples, we are called to feel this pulse and make our lives beat in rhythm with it. The love commandment that Jesus gives to his disciples depends on God’s limitless love for the world (John 3:16). This love is made incarnate and dwells among us in Jesus, the one who is “close to the Father’s heart” (John 1:18; NRSV), and so Jesus’s own relationship with his Father, his own life and death, become the norm of the costly love he asks of his disciples. This must not be a cramped or grudging love, but joyful and expansive, encompassing the world for which Jesus was sent.

One of the most priceless human gifts is friendship. It allows us to disclose ourselves to and receive from another in complete openness and trust. With a friend we can think aloud; participate in one another’s joys and sorrows, hopes and fears; survive loneliness, indifference, hostility. Small wonder, then, that in today’s gospel Jesus calls his disciples by this most precious of names: “my friends.” Drawn into and abiding in the mutual love of the Father and the Son, disciples are no longer called servants but friends.

The Johannine community was to live as friends and so, throughout his gospel, John introduces us to various occasions of friendship: John the Baptist, the precursor and “the friend of the bridegroom” (John 3:29; NRSV) who, like a best man, hands over the bride Israel to Jesus; the family at Bethany, especially Lazarus, the friend for whom he wept at his grave and for whom Jesus was the tomb breaker (John 11:35-44); Pilate, who at a critical moment preferred to be a friend of Caesar rather than Jesus

(John 19:12); the disciple beloved of Jesus (John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7); and Peter, the forgiven friend who will lead and shepherd the community of the forgiven (John 21:44ff.). As we gather around the table of our eucharistic supper, we hear that we have been chosen by Jesus as his friends and commissioned to befriend the world in and with the love he has shown us.

The most startling, profound, yet simple naming of God is proclaimed in the reading from the First Letter of John: “God is love.” The letter is addressed to the “[b]eloved,” those with whom God has taken the initiative, who are parented by God’s love, and this self-giving love is the source of human love. Like today’s gospel whose heartbeat is love, so love beats strongly in this reading—named nine times in its four verses. It is love that is expansive and global, yet also intimate and personal, revealed most fully in Jesus, the Son of God and our brother.

In a remarkable photographic event, at the turn of the millennium invitations were sent to 192 countries inviting photographers to submit entries that captured and celebrated the essence of humanity’s “Moments of Intimacy, Laughter and Kinship.” Ultimately, seventeen thousand photographers from 164 countries entered with over forty thousand photographs. As well as becoming an international traveling exhibition, the winning photographs are published as three incredible books entitled *Family*, *Friendship*, and *Love*. As love always does, the images reach across all continents and races, youth and age, poverty and affluence, to reveal the heart of humanity and, surely, the heart of God.



The viewer has no idea if the God of Jesus Christ is known or unknown to the 6-year-old “policeman” in the slums of Calcutta who is holding up his hand to stop the traffic so that three blind men, their hands on one another’s shoulders, can safely cross the road; whether any prayers are being murmured by the 84-year-old woman saying goodbye to her dying 92-year-old friend; or what is the faith of the parents welcoming their womb-wet, wailing newborn. But the Christian gazing on these photographs, or on such realities in our everyday lives, can surely say: “God is love.”

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you.”

To the point: Today’s gospel comes from Jesus’s discourse at the Last Supper in John’s gospel. Last Sunday we pondered the first half of the parable of the True Vine, and this week we contemplate the second part. While enjoining his disciples to follow the commandments, love one another, remain in him, and bear fruit for the glory of God, Jesus reminds them that his words are not to burden them with excess worries or tasks, but instead are intended for the fullness of their joy.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: In today’s gospel, Jesus commissions the disciples “to go and bear fruit that will remain.” For the first ten chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, we find Jesus’s followers bringing the good news of his life, death, and resurrection to their fellow Jews, but now, with the baptism of Cornelius and his household in the first reading, a new (and fruitful) ministry is inaugurated to the Gentiles. Though Peter’s question (“Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people, / who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?”) might seem hypothetical, at the time this baptism brought both a legal and a spiritual risk. Before preaching to Cornelius and his family, Peter tells them, “You know that it is unlawful for a Jewish man to associate with, or visit, a Gentile” (Acts 10:28; NABRE). Fear of disapproval from his fellow Christians or the law does not dissuade Peter from his proclamation of the gospel. He has been enjoined by Jesus to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19; NABRE) and he will do so.

to experience: In his faithfulness to the actions of the Holy Spirit, Peter welcomes Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and his family into the body of Christ through baptism, proclaiming, “In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. / Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly / is acceptable to him.” How does your parish community reflect this attitude of inclusivity and respect for different nationalities, cultures, and ethnicities?

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Today’s psalm invokes us to “[s]ing to the Lord a new song.” Peter’s actions in the Acts of the Apostles leads to a new age in the life of the church and within the history of salvation as both Jews and Gentiles join together in Jesus to praise and worship the living God.

to psalmist preparation: St. Augustine famously addressed God as the one who is “ever ancient, ever new.” Our faith calls us to a dynamic tension between these seemingly opposing truths of our Creator, and away from statically clinging to tradition when God is calling us to newness in the spiritual life. Where is your community being challenged to “sing a new song”?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter tells the kneeling Cornelius to “get up. I myself am also a human being.” Are there spiritual leaders you tend to idolize or place on a pedestal?

Today’s responsorial psalm invites us to “[s]ing to the Lord a new song.” Where is God calling you to newness in the spiritual life?

In his first letter, St. John tells us, “[T]his is love: / not that we have loved God, but that he loved us.” In your relationship with God, do you find yourself more comfortable pondering your love for God or God’s love for you?

In the gospel, Jesus expresses his desire that “my joy may be in you / and your joy might be complete.” Where do you find your greatest joy at this moment in your life?