

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 14:23

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

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

R. 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

When we are young we learn a list of “dos” and “don’ts.” Don’t cross the street without looking both ways. Do show respect for your elders. Don’t misbehave. Do treat people the way you would like to be treated. Lend a hand in cleaning the dishes after a meal. The list is seemingly endless. Some grade-school children learn the list well and follow all the rules. And some of these might even become a little self-righteous with the way they follow the rules in the midst of many others who do not. There is a comfort that can come from following the rules, doing what is expected, keeping the list. But there also comes a time when we grow out of childhood, internalize the purpose of the rules, and live as adults.



Even the Old Testament had a list, which today we refer to as the Ten Commandments. Honor your father and mother. Do not covet another’s belongings. Here again, learning the list and following it is rather easy and straightforward. It’s literally a checklist as to how to be good and honorable in God’s sight. And too often we encounter (or have become ourselves) those who are a bit smug in the way they keep the rules and follow the list, much like proud grade-school children who find comfort and validation in mere obedience.

But Jesus gives us a command in today’s gospel that supersedes all others. It is simply this: “love one another.” Of course, with a command like this, it can be seductive to return to a checklist! How much easier would it be to maintain a checklist, such as, going to church, celebrating the sacraments, fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. But the command issued by Jesus is much more difficult. A command to love knows no bounds, knows no checklist. It can be much easier to simply attend church once a week, and again on days of obligation, than it can be to “love.” By this command Jesus invites us to an adult spirituality, no longer satisfied by keeping a list. We are not children who need to be told to help with cleaning up after dinner. We do this naturally out of love. And we likely do much more.

There is no box to check for “love.” Love does not count the cost or put a limit on what price is too high. Love can always do more. Love is based on a personal relationship with another that is not transactional but self-giving. As Jesus says in the gospel, his love for his friends reaches the point of laying down his own life for them. There is no boundary to what love calls us to do. And for that reason, we might prefer a list of dos and don’ts. But that is not what we receive from Jesus. We receive from him a command simple but demanding: “love one another.”

Living the Paschal Mystery

The Christian life, modeled on Jesus, is about a freedom to love to the point of laying down one’s life for the other. A relationship with Jesus necessarily involves a relationship with his friends. And these friends are called to love not only Jesus and the Father but, perhaps more importantly, one another. How much simpler the spiritual life would be if we only had to focus on loving Jesus, or loving God. But to be a friend of Jesus means we must love his other friends as well. This kind of love is not simply a checklist of good deeds, but a dying

to self that puts the other first. This love is self-sacrificial and demands we put our own wants, needs, and desires aside to serve and love the other. But, some might respond, others have so many needs there is no way we can meet them all. We would die trying. "Precisely," is the answer we might expect. The Christian life is one that demands a kind of heroism of daily self-sacrifice, daily dying to one's self. This is the paschal mystery given to us by Jesus himself. For when we give ourselves to the point of no return, God is there to raise us up to new life.

Focusing the Gospel

John 15:9-17

Chapters 13 through 17 of John's gospel, Jesus' Last Supper discourse, might be called Jesus' last will and testament to his fledgling disciples.

Continuing last Sunday's theme of the vine and branches, Jesus speaks of the love of God as the bonding agent between himself and his disciples, and the disciples and one another. The model of love for the faithful disciple—"love one another as I love you"—is total, limitless, and unconditional. The love manifested in the life and teachings of the gospel Jesus and the resurrection of Christ creates an entirely new relationship between God and humanity: In Christ, we are not "slaves" of a distant divine Creator but "friends" of God who hears the prayers and cries made to him in Jesus' name. That love becomes the source of our lives' joy; in that love, we realize the meaning and purpose of our lives. As "friends of God," we are called to reflect that love to the rest of the world.

Focusing the First Reading

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was a religious man, the kind of Gentile whom the Jews called a "God fearer." Cornelius has a dream in which an angel instructs him to send for Peter. Peter's meeting with Cornelius is a revelation, both for the officer and the apostle: Peter begins to understand that God calls all men and women—not just religious Jews—to himself. This is a critical development in the growth of the new church, which has been wrestling with the tensions between its deeply ingrained Jewish identity and practices and what that might mean for the mission to the Gentiles.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 98:1, 2-3, 3-4 (2b)

Psalm 98 is one of a series of consecutive psalms (95-100) inviting the hearer to join in praising God as savior/deliverer, king/sovereign, and judge/lawgiver. Today's responsorial psalm is inspired by some great military victory or act of deliverance by God: some scholars suggest that these psalms may have been composed for the rededication of the temple following Israel's return from Babylonian exile.

Focusing the Second Reading

1 John 4:7-10

The author of the Johannine epistles writes eloquently of the love of God revealed in his only Son. In today's second reading, the writer speaks of love as being of God to the point that he says those who love know God. He does not state this the other way around, as though knowing God necessarily leads to love. Instead, for this author, everyone who loves knows God.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

What does it mean to be a "friend" of God, as opposed to simply believing in the existence of God?

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Who is your best friend, and what makes him or her so? Has that friendship ever been tested?

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How have your ideals and beliefs about love changed throughout your life?

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How do we know that God loves us?

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How has Christ "chosen" us—and for what?

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