

Homily – May 5th, 2024 – 6th Sunday of Easter



This gospel reading is a continuation of the gospel reading from last Sunday. Last Sunday, Jesus told us to abide in him, to remain in him, so that our lives would *bear fruit*. In today's reading, Jesus is putting a little different spin on things. He's telling us to abide in his love so that his *joy* may be in us and that our new-found joy will be complete. Complete joy is not a joy that is fleeting. Rather, complete joy is a joy that gives our lives fulfillment and purpose. When we love, we keep the connection going. Our lives bear fruit and we find joy. When we don't love, we break the connection between the vine and the branches, our lives don't bear fruit, and we're desperately looking for the next "fix" to make us happy.

We keep the connection through the world of love, which is always much easier to talk about than to live. Jesus says, "***love one another as I have loved you.***" The key word is that little word "as". If we can figure out how Jesus loved and continues to love us, we'll know how we ought to love one another.

This gospel text tells us that Jesus' love is shown in three ways. Firstly, he surrenders his life for the sake of us. He says that this is the highest expression of love. "***No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.***" We're so familiar with the fact that Jesus gave his life for us on the Cross, that it almost loses it power.

There is story that took place about 30 years ago in Florida. An 8-year-old girl was dying of leukemia, and she need a life-saving blood transfusion. The only match was her 10-year-old brother. When asked by his parents if he would be willing to do this, he answered, "I have to think about this." The next day he informed his parents that he wanted to save his sister's life. At the hospital, as he was being

prepped by the nurse and with his parents leaning over him, he looked up and asked the nurse, “How long will it take before I die?” He thought he was giving his life to his sister, right there and then. He didn’t realize that he was giving a blood sample only. Not knowing the difference, he was willing to give his life for his sister. That’s the first way Jesus loves us. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

The second way Jesus loves us is by no longer calling us slaves but friends. Slaves, in John’s gospel, is connected with sin, from which the disciples have been freed. But friendship is more than just being freed from sin, it’s also sharing in an intimacy. The friends of Jesus are those who have the closest relationship with him.

Psychologists have long told us that over an entire lifetime, the human psyche is only capable of a maximum of five intense relationships, five friendships. If, before you die, you can say that over your lifetime you had five friends, you will die the luckiest person in the world. Those 400 friends you have on Facebook, are not friends; they are acquaintances. A friend is someone from whom you hold nothing back. A friend is determined much more by someone you can cry with than someone you can laugh with. A friend is someone who you can share your deepest secrets with, and you know, after hearing it, they will not be scandalized nor will they abandon you. Friends hold each other in a sacred bond. Jesus is able to call his disciples friends because he held nothing back from them. ***“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.”*** In every master/servant relationship the master always holds something back from the servant in order to keep the “one-up” position going. A teacher doesn’t tell her students everything she knows, otherwise, in the world of competition, the student may compete for the teacher’s job. And, guess what? You’re now out of a job. Jesus, on the other hand, loves us by destroying all categories of master and slave. He will never stop calling you his friend.

During the Last Supper he knew that Judas was about to betray him into the hands of evil men for 30 pieces of silver. Yet, he still treats Judas like a friend and gives Judas his Body and Blood as freely as he gives it to the other 11 apostles. That same night, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas betrays Jesus with a sign of

intimacy, a kiss. Judas had already told the officials that the one he kisses is the one they should arrest. Judas kisses Jesus who responds, ***“Friend, do what you have come to do.”*** It’s the ultimate act of betrayal, yet Jesus doesn’t call Judas a traitor. He calls him, “friend.” “I no longer call you servants...even if you betray me...I call you friends.”

The first way that Jesus shows his love is by giving his life for you. The second way that Jesus shows his love is by calling you his friend. The third way Jesus loves you is by choosing you and not vice versa. Nobody, whatever the circumstances of their birth or the way their life unfolds, is an accident. Everyone you meet, including the person you see in the mirror, is a divine choice. It’s almost too good for some people to believe. You were chosen to be the perpetual recipient of God’s unconditional love. I think Fr. Richard Rohr says it better than I do when he writes in one of his books Things Hidden, ***“God is still trying to give God away. Yet, no one seems to want God. What we want is a worthiness system. We like superiority contests. I want something that I can say that I have earned. Totally free gifts say nothing about me.”***

Isn’t that interesting, that accepting our chosen-ness in God is as difficult as accepting a gift. Fr. Rohr writes in another book (Soul Brothers) the following, ***“The chosen are never the same as the worthy. Yes, many are called, in fact all. But very few allow themselves to be chosen. They would rather be “worthy.”***

If I can add anything to his thoughts it would be that our reluctance to receive God’s grace, God’s free gift of God’s self, is linked to our inability to see ourselves as God’s chosen, God’s beloved. Yet, that is what we are. We are chosen like bread. Likewise, we are broken in order to give ourselves to others. In the process, we remind others that they are God’s chosen as well.

Jesus loves us by giving his life for us, by calling us friends, and by reminding us that we are his chosen for all eternity.

~Fr. Phil