

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Sixth Sunday of Easter

First reading:

*The Conversion of Cornelius
(Acts 10.25-26, 34-35, 44-48)*

Jesus was the Messiah of Judaism, bringing to completion the promises made to Abraham. It came as a surprise to the first Christians that the salvation brought by Jesus was meant not just for Jews alone but for all the peoples of the earth. This is the scene where it happens.

Peter has been prepared for it by a vision which annulled the Jewish food laws. Then he was summoned to bring the gentile Cornelius to the faith. Now, even while he is speaking to Cornelius and his household, the Spirit takes matters (so to speak) into his own hands and comes down upon Cornelius. A gentile Pentecost.

Today also we are happy to think of our own group as the chosen ones, neglecting the breadth of God's love and desire that all people should turn to him and be saved. We can read again and again that Jesus actually went out of his way to welcome lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, and we still find it hard to believe that to God they are not 'undesirables'.

God has no favourites, but it is much more comfortable for us to stay snugly wrapped up in our own neat cocoons.

Question:

How far does the message of Christ extend beyond Christianity?

Second reading:

*Christian Love
(1 John 4.7-10)*

At this time the Jews regarded gentiles as 'dogs'. This did not mean beloved pets, for dogs were either frightening guard dogs or filthy scavengers. The first reading showed us God actually taking gentiles to himself by sending the Spirit upon them. The second reading now meditates on the nature of that love.

The old niggardly saying, 'I love him but I can't stand the sight of him', will not do if God is love itself and love itself is the nature of God. If God is not only the source of love and of life, but simply is love itself, even the distant 'wishing somebody well' from my heart is not enough. Would any of us be satisfied and comfortable with the idea that God doesn't actually like me but wishes me well in a distant sort of way? Love generates affection, respect, trust, a desire to come closer to the other.

It is comforting to know that I am a son of God and can call God 'Abba', but the consequence is more daunting, that you too - whoever you are - are also the closest member of my family, despite all your faults.

Question:

Do the faults of your own family impede or enhance your love?

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Gospel

(John 15.9-17)

The continuing Love of Jesus

Like so many of the great discourses of Jesus in the gospel of John, these are not a shorthand record of Jesus' words, but will have been written up afterwards. Most probably there were several slightly different versions of what Jesus said at the Last Supper.

In any case, one can see that the author has in mind two different levels, both Jesus' own historical situation at the Last Supper and the situation of the early Church, where the disciples are being hard put to the test in their mission. They need encouraging by Jesus' own example of his sacrifice and by his promise of real friendship: they are friends, not servants, specially chosen by Jesus to bear fruit that will last.

So we, too, are welcomed as friends, chosen and commissioned by Jesus to go out and bear fruit, but reminded that we must be prepared to pay the price. There is no fruit without pruning. Jesus had just given the example of service by washing the feet of his disciples. If we are to share the joy of Jesus, we must be ready to join him also in laying down his life for his friends.

Question:

Do we ever have to make hard choices for Christ?
