

6th SUNDAY EASTER

John 15:9-17

MUTUAL LOVE

One way of approaching the words of Jesus from the Last Supper Discourse in John read today is to consider their relationship to the activities and teaching of Jesus during his ministry. When Jesus spoke of a man showing no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends, we recall Jesus as the **Good Shepherd** who lays down his life for his sheep.

When he claimed to make known what he had heard from the Father, we remember Jesus' role as **revealer**. He made his fullest statement of this claim before Annas, "I have spoken publicly to the world...and in secret I have said nothing." When he told his disciples that he had chosen them, not they him, we recall how he called them at the beginning of the Gospel.

We can also explore parallels elsewhere in the Discourse. The mention of the fruit the disciples were to bear returns us to the figure of the **Vine**. The promise that the Father would give them **anything they asked for** calls to mind Jesus' insistence that they must let his words find a home in them. His mention of the **joy** they would one day experience anticipates his description of joy to come, as well as his meeting with them on Easter Day.

Sometimes in the Discourse, which is a long section in John's gospel, a key word is repeated again and again. Such a word in today's passage is **LOVE**. During his ministry, Jesus taught mostly about **LIFE**, but once the supper began, it was love that he emphasized. We learn how this love is shown by the Father to the Son, how the disciple must not only abide in Jesus, as a branch in the vine, but must also **abide in the love of Jesus**.

Surprisingly, the disciples are not told to love Jesus but to keep his commandments. But the only commandment found in John is that of **mutual love** to be limited only by death. Hence, the disciples of Jesus become no longer servants **but friends**, as Moses had been a friend of God. This is what Jesus meant when, at the beginning of the Supper, he had **washed the feet** of the disciples and told them to wash one another's feet; they were to love each other as he had loved them.

And yet it is easier to keep the commandments, the laws, and regulations of the Church, **than to practice Love** as Jesus lived it. I will always remember the scene when the elders brought before Jesus a woman caught in adultery. Where was the man, since they admitted that she was caught in the act? Jesus gave us two commandments – to love God and to love our neighbor. Notice, a theology of the head asks, who is my neighbor, whereas a theology of the heart caused the elders to drop their stones.

In my homily last Sunday, **I presented a dialogue between Jesus and Joseph**, a dialogue about love of a parent for his son and a child's love for his parents, and I even quoted scripture. I was chastised, or to use Scripture's word, I was rebuked for putting words into God's mouth, and that his Word, that is Scripture was enough. I found this a strange reasoning since we are asked to put on Christ Jesus in all that we do and say.

There seems to be a dangerous dichotomy today when we express our theology of love and it is read as putting words into God's mouth. Our theology of the Head should lead us to a theology of love since, as John reminds us, **God is love**. When our theology stays in the head, then we become fundamentalists, yes, even fundamentalist Catholics. If God is love, then even our theology of the head should eventually lead to and support a theology of the heart, especially the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

After the resurrection, there is a scene in John's gospel where Jesus meets Peter on the beach by a fire with fish cooking and asks him the first two times, "Do you love me, Peter?" Jesus uses the word **agape**, which means a love that one would die for. Peter answers, "Yes, Lord, I love you." But Peter uses the word **philia**, which means a love that one would not necessarily die for, as in the name of the city, Philadelphia, city of brotherly love. Notice that Jesus did not use the time to teach doctrine or more commandments and rules and regulations. There are Christians who would die for doctrine and rules, but Jesus asked Peter to die for love. Jesus asked Peter a third time. "Do you love me, Peter?" but uses the word **philia** this time, only because Jesus meets us where we are at, not where he wants us to be.

Today is Mother's Day. Sometime today tell God that you love her too.