

REFLECTION

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Gospel John 15: 9-17

Today's Gospel passage follows immediately in John's account from where the Gospel on the Fifth Sunday of Easter ended. Love is the theme connecting all of today's readings. The Father loves the Son. The Father's Son loves his disciples to the point he considers his disciples friends. His commandment is love; love one another. In love, we as his disciples bring forth fruit into the world.

Today's gospel is a continuation of Jesus's teaching on the Vine and branches heard last Sunday. Both segments are from Jesus's last discourse to his disciples in which he prepares them for his coming suffering and Death. Before he leaves them, he wants them to understand how he has loved them, and how they are to love one another. At the meal, he had already given them an example of love when he washed their feet. What he taught through this loving action, he also teaches with words.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus' disciples must have observed the loving relationship between Jesus and his Father. Now Jesus tells them, "As the Father loves me, so I also love you." As the Father's love is unwavering and generous, so too is Jesus' love for his disciples. The love of the Father for Jesus, and the love of Jesus for his friends, illustrates for them how they are to love one another.

This reading is set in the context of John's long, Last Supper discourse, which is Jesus's farewell address to his disciples. It offers support, encouragement, challenge, and direction for continuing the mission once Jesus is no longer physically present. Jesus offers himself as the example upon which ministry is to be modeled. It was first manifested in the Father's relationship to Jesus, and by extension, Jesus' relationship to us. The heart of this consists of reaching out in love and concern to all, giving even to the point of death. "No one has greater love than this" (John 15: 13) is the very foundation of ministry.

This can only be accomplished in and through the intimacy we are called to by Jesus: "I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father" (John 15:15). That intimacy has to be consistently cultivated if we are ever to go out in mission and be of service to others. We cannot do it on our own. It is the Lord's work, accomplished in and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The key word that needs to be stressed in this passage is the word "REMAIN." The challenge given to us, to "remain" in God's love as expressed in the person of Jesus. The call to friendship with Jesus demands a reciprocal response from us. This friendship enables us to approach and enter into that knowledge of what God desires, and what we, in turn, are called to do.