

6th Sunday of Easter - B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

Our first reading today takes place several years after Jesus' passion, death and resurrection – after Saul's conversion (last weeks' reading). The conversion of the pagan Cornelius is one of the high points of the Acts of the Apostles. Cornelius was the centurion in command of the Italian cohort stationed at Caesarea. He was a proselyte (one who approaches) of the type called "those who fear God," who accepted the Jewish Law but did not become full members of the Jewish community by circumcision.

Cornelius' conversion is an extremely important event because it demonstrates the fact that the Gospel is addressed to all men and shows that the power of the Holy Spirit knows no limits. Up to this point the Gospel has been preached only to Jews. Its extension to the Samaritans was seen as an announcement of salvation to people who had at one time formed part of the Chosen People. By preaching only to Jews, the disciples were having regard to the fact that the people of Israel were the only people chosen by God to be bearers of the divine promises – therefore they had a right to be the first to receive the definitive message of salvation. Our Lord Himself had acted on this principle and had told His disciples to preach only "to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 10:6).

Now God steps in to make Peter realize that the Good News is meant for all – it is His desire that all men be saved and therefore the Christians need to shed the narrow ideas of Judaism as regards the scope of salvation and proclaim the Good News to the ends of the earth; to all people in all lands.

²⁵ When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and, falling at his feet, paid him homage.

This gesture was normally regarded as cultic, implying that the person so honored was either divine or angelic.

²⁶ Peter, however, raised him up, saying, "Get up. I myself am also a human being."

Saint Peter wards off the act of reverence which Cornelius has given him. In the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, this form of greeting the apostle was not unusual because those who met the apostles did not regard them as mere humans.

³⁴ Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality.

Literally, "God is not one showing favors" is an allusion to Deuteronomy 10:17. Salvation is available to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

³⁵ Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.

One who acts uprightly is one who practices righteousness. Saint Peter implies that this can be done even if one is not a Jew.

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these things, the holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word.

Just like the Holy Spirit came to all in the Upper Room at Pentecost.

⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter

The Jewish converts who had come from Joppa with him.

were astounded that the gift of the holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles also,

This is an echo of Joel's prophecy (Joel 3:1-5) which was applied to Pentecost in Acts 2:17-18.

⁴⁶ for they could hear them speaking in tongues and glorifying God.

Just as at the first Pentecost appearance when He came upon Peter and the apostles.

Then Peter responded, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people, who have received the holy Spirit even as we have?"

God is the one who is in control of this situation. The Spirit has moved, the institution can only follow.

⁴⁸ He ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

This is a baptismal formula which appears only in the Acts of the Apostles. This does not necessarily mean that this is the form of words which the apostles normally used in the liturgy rather than the Trinitarian formula prescribed by Jesus (Matthew 28:19). It simply means "becoming a member of Christ, becoming a Christian."

2nd Reading - 1 John 4:7-10

Being children of God, we are called to show that divine filiation in our dealings with others. We are to show love in our dealings with our fellow man. This is not the love that is natural to man, but the love that has been revealed by God and is perceived by faith.

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God;

The motive of love is the origin of love in God; whoever loves, thereby proves that he has his own origin in the same God with whom he has fellowship.

everyone who loves is begotten by God

He is born of God.

and knows God. ⁸ Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.

Love not only comes from God as from a source, it is itself the very essence of God.

⁹ In this way the love of God was revealed to us:

The love of God as He has made it known to men is through revelation.

God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him.

The supreme event in which God has revealed His love has been His mission of His Son into this world to be its savior. By being saved we become heirs to the eternal kingdom.

¹⁰ In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins.

This love has been wholly gratuitous on God's part, unmotivated by any worthiness on the part of man (Romans 5:5-9); it is a love that has a meaning in man only to the extent that it continues the love revealed in God. He who was sinless made the perfect sacrifice for all of us who are sinful and imperfect.

Gospel - John 15:9-17

Last week we heard Jesus teach of the vine and the branches and how God the vine dresser prunes the branches to increase their yield and how He removes completely the branches which remain unproductive. Today we hear that teaching continued.

⁹ As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.

Love is the principle of the relation between the Father to the Son; the same love has brought the Church into being.

¹⁰ 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.

The disciples must continue to keep themselves worthy of the protection of Christ's love. Not once saved, always saved – they must continue to live and love in Christ.

¹¹ "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.

Jesus' death is the highest example of love – and for Him it is not a sad, but a joyous, event.

¹² This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Jesus own joyous sacrifice is the example which we are all called to emulate. Not senseless death, but the giving of our very selves for others. The love of Christ gives us the ability to do this.

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I no longer call you slaves,

There was nothing wrong with being known as the slaves of God. The Hebrews had borne this title since the sin of the golden calf.

because a slave does not know what his master is doing.

In the normal course of things, the slave is not admitted to the counsels of the master; he simply obeys.

I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.

As God's children, we have a share in the divine inheritance and Jesus has revealed His (and our) Father's plan to us.

¹⁶ 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.

The mission of the Apostles, and ours as well, is to follow Christ. To preach and teach. We can accomplish this mission when we seek effectiveness through prayer (“... through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior . . .”).

¹⁷ This I command you: love one another.

It is God's love that has brought the Church together. The Son was sent by the Father, and the Son has chosen His own, whose mission and whole life continues the work of divine grace.