



Contributed by Fr. Ray Reitzel, C.R.

Born in Waterloo and is #9 in a family of 9 boys and 3 girls. One brother (Harry) is a C.R. priest, and two sisters are Notre Dame Sisters. He taught for 31 years at St. Jerome's H.S., Kitchener, and at St. Joseph-Scollard Hall in North Bay. He served in 4 parishes for 17 years. He is now semi-retired and living at Resurrection Manor, Waterloo, a residence for retired CRs.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER MAY 9, 2021

GATHERING TIME (10-15 minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

Today's topic is far beyond our comprehension. We can barely make a few scratches on the surface. The topic: **God's love for us**. As John says, in today's 2nd reading, "God is love!" or, God = love! Fr. Eugene Boylan wrote a great book about God, *This Tremendous Lover*. He writes: "Here is a perfect picture of our tremendous lover. Everything that happens to us is but the touch of 'His hand, outstretched caressingly,' to draw us to Himself, to mould us to His Heart's desire. All He asks of us is that we put our faith and hope in Him, that we love Him with our whole heart, that we renounce our own pretended strength and our foolish plans, by humility and abandonment; He will do the rest." Check Google for more.

The **first principle** of Resurrectionist spirituality is: "God loves us unconditionally". **Our Mission Statement** states: "Convinced of God's unconditional love for us, we herald the liberation and salvation of each person and society, as a passage from death to life, in which every situation of evil and injustice will be overcome."

God's love for EACH one of us is as if I am the only person existing. God gives each of us His full and undivided attention. God is more present to me than the **air** I breathe. The breath of life! God is like the **sun** that shines on all, giving life and light, more than any one of us could ever handle.

We attempt to make contact with God's presence by being open to God, with an open heart, an open mind, open eyes, open ears, a loving touch ... and through prayer, Scripture reflection, the sacraments, beholding God's works of creation, and bringing God's love and mercy to others.

Warm-up Activity (about 8-10 minutes)

"I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). As a warm-up for today's readings, share an experience of when you may have felt close to God's presence in a very special way, as in the 'air we breathe', or, as touched by the 'warmth of the sun', or....

The Table of the Word

The Boundless Nature of God's Love: The message of today's readings seems simple enough: because **God has loved us first**, we are all called and empowered to love.

Even the most sublime of *human love* has boundaries beyond which it cannot pass, limits beyond which it is not able to go. No matter how perfect we conceive our capacity for love to be, its fullest reach is always beyond our grasp. As we perform these 'human' acts **in love**, with God's grace, they become 'spiritual acts', holy moments, immersed in God's presence.

I like the **image of the candle we receive at Baptism**, which is lit from the Easter Candle, the Light of Christ. As we make that light shine in our daily acts of love, the candle does not get shorter and burn out, but it only grows longer and brighter, as we grow in Christ.

Our challenge today is to be especially attentive to today's scriptural word in our reflections and dialogue. Our prayer is that, with the help of God's Spirit (grace), we may grasp just a little more of this—the most profound of life's mysteries: "**This is love, not that we loved God, but that he first loved us.**" (1 John 4:10).

Leader: Jesus calls us *friends* in today's Gospel. It is this friendship which empowers us now, to love one another in the same way that He loves us. We pray today for the grace to realize that **no one** is outside of God's embrace, because *God is Love*, meaning that we remain in God's love as friends so long as we commit to *loving one another*.

Lord Jesus, we celebrate the depth of your love and your grace,
Christ Jesus, you prompt us to love one another without exception,
Lord Jesus, we pray always to abide in your love,

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray (together):
*Your love, O God, is revealed among us
in the gift of your Son Jesus, who laid down his life, and bestows on us
the joy of abiding in your love. We pray that you will bring forth in us
fruit that will last, and teach us, God of love, how to love one another.
This we ask through Jesus, your Son, our Brother. Amen. Alleluia!*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

FIRST READING (Acts 10:25–26, 34–35, 44–48)

On Peter's arrival, Cornelius, a centurion of the Roman cohort, met him, and falling at his feet, worshipped him. But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a man." Then Peter began to speak, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation, anyone who fears him, and does what is right, is acceptable to him." While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God.

Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water, for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So, he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (1 John 4:7–10)

Beloved, let us **love** one another, because **love** is from God; everyone who **loves** is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not **love** does not know God, for **God is love**.

God's **love** was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this, is **love**, not that we **loved** God, but that he **loved** us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (John 15:9–17)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus said to his disciples: “As the Father has **loved** me, so I have loved you; **abide** in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.

“I have said these things to you so that my **joy** may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s **friends**.

“You are my friends if you do what I command you. 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.

“You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means “sacred reading.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This Word proclaimed today is God’s own Word, God’s way of speaking to you today through his own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this Word you have just heard to touch you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a thought or word or image that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, spend a few moments simply to treasure it.

COMMENTARY:

Our **first reading** is a wonderful story about how various people are called to **re-order their lives** (i.e. change their plans) as they encounter God. **Cornelius is a centurion** of the Italia cohort stationed in Caesarea; he was a devout and God-fearing man, who gave generously to Jewish causes and prayed constantly to God (Acts 10:1). In a vision, he is told to send for a man called Simon, known as Peter.

Meanwhile, **Peter** encounters his own vision, where a sheet containing every kind of animal appears, accompanied by a voice that says, “Now, Peter; kill and eat.” Peter protests that he has never eaten anything profane or unclean. But the voice spoke to him, saying, “What God has made clean, you have no right to call profane.” As these two characters, Cornelius and Peter, meet later, they each find that they need to re-order their lives. Cornelius and his household listen to Peter’s account of God’s good news, embodied by Jesus, and how Peter has been ordered by God to proclaim the Good News to the Gentiles.

The Holy Spirit comes down upon them, leaving those who accompanied Peter, “astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit could be poured out on the pagans too.” For his part, Peter also undergoes a conversion, realizing that God was calling him to preach to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. As he recounts this story to others, he says, “I realized that God was giving to them, just as He gave to us, when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; and who was I to stand in God’s way? (Acts 11:17) Both

Cornelius and Peter were **open to God's will, and ready to change their plans**, to re-order their lives, as they opened themselves to an encounter with God.

Our **second reading** stresses the concrete nature of God's love for us, "for **God is love....**God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this, is love, not that we loved God but that he first loved us." Often in the past, at some great sports event, this **sign was displayed** from the stands, by a witness to the faith: **JOHN 3:16**, which reads, "God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not die, but have eternal life." 1 John 4:16: "God is love, and those who live in love, live in union with God and **God lives in union with them**".

Jesus describes this union very well in using the image, "**I am the vine, and you are the branches!**" in the gospel from last week and this week.

The **Gospel** continues from last week's Gospel. Jesus uses the word '**abide**' 11 times. The word 'abide' shows up in other versions of the Bible as: "live", "remain", "dwell", "make your home".

Jesus uses the image of "I am the vine, and you are the branches...**Abide** in me as I will **abide in** you. Just as a branch cannot bear any fruit by itself, unless it **abides** in the vine.**abide** in my love. If you keep the commandments, you will **abide** in my love.". Each of these images indicates how close we can be to God.

If we are really aware of this tremendous presence and love of God for us, it would really change our lives. We can only make attempts to "**see**" **glimpses of the beauty of God** in our daily life.

All of God's creation reveals the glory, the majesty, and awesomeness of God.

We often see this in the splendor of some **sunrises and sun sets**. Many of us are sent emails, depicting the beauty of flowers, **nature**, loving dogs, cats, sea life, etc...reflecting God's imagination and beauty.

I find this in some music, such as K.D. Lang in "**Constant Craving**" on hearing the music and focusing the words on our "constant craving for God"; Leonard Cohen with his great rendition of "**Hallelujah**"; Led Zeppelin with his "**Stairway to Heaven**". You can get these any time on your computer, through online music services. I am sure you could name some more.

The TV series, "**Touched by an Angel**" was a good depiction of God's presence to us in our daily lives, reminding us of our "Guardian Angels" who are constantly at our service.

Psalm 42:

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and behold the face of God?

St. Paul, "Eye cannot see, ear cannot hear, **nor can we ever imagine**, what God has in store for those who love Him!" (1 Corinthians 2:9)

St. Augustine, "Lord, you have made us for yourself., and our hearts are restless, until they have found rest in You!"

God is beyond our imagination, but we keep searching for glimpses of God's eternal Presence. To achieve the above, Jesus reminds us, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love," His commandment of **LOVE**, goes beyond the 10 commandments. "Love God with your whole heart and soul, and with all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself," "Love one another as I have loved you," "Love your enemies," etc.

We might remember that our **gospel reading** takes place **at the Last Supper** when Jesus addresses all the Apostles: Judas who will betray him, Peter who will deny him, and all the other disciples who will desert him. Yet, these are those whom he calls his "friends." Like the disciples, despite our unworthiness, we too have been called to go out and bear fruit. Or perhaps, we might say that

BECAUSE of our unworthiness, we have been called to go out and bear fruit. Why the change in wording? Because only when we realize our sinfulness and brokenness, will we truly appreciate the love that God has for us ... that Jesus would be willing to die, not for a “good man” but for “sinners” (Romans 5:6-8). Only if we are forgiven much, will we appreciate that we are loved much. And this love and forgiveness has the power to change us—to help us to re-order our lives—so that we will bear much fruit through our love. As Jesus said about the sinful woman: “Her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven her, or she would not have shown such great love”. (Luke 7:47).

(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the Commentary, to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. (Acts) “*I truly understand that God shows no partiality ...*”

- a) When you were very young, did you have a sense that somehow **other Church denominations were “not as good” as yours**, that somehow yours was superior? Talk about your perceptions and experiences from your early years. Is your attitude towards other religious expressions the same now as it was then? If not, what has changed? Are you pleased with the change? (We can thank Vatican II, 1962-1965, for these new attitudes)
- b) We all have **bias**. Share when a bias may be good, or may be bad.

2. (1 John) “*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God.*”

“It’s the little things that count,” is an expression we often associate with a loving relationship.

- a) What are some of the little things that count in terms of your own experience of love?
- b) What little things, are really big things for you, in your communicating of love and friendship?

3. (Gospel) “*I have not called you servants; I have called you “friends.”*”

- a) Talk about your own disposition in regard to “friends.” Do you have a large network of friends? Or is that number relatively small? Comment.
- b) As God abides, or dwells with us, what are some images, or music, or TV programs, people, experiences, that bring you into the presence of God?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. **Word for the Week:** “The most intense joys in life arise when we are able to elicit joy in others, as a foretaste of heaven.” (Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, #129)

2. **Suggestion for the Week: How do we know God’s presence?**

The answer is clear in the letter of John: God is love. Love and God are identical; “love” and “God” are interchangeable terms. Whenever we experience real love, therefore, we experience God. What an insight this is, and what a light on the path of our search for God. To find God, to experience divine presence, all we need to do is experience giving or receiving love. God is the wonder, beauty, power, and joy of any loving interaction (holy moments) we are involved in. (cf. Michael Kent, 1996).

3. Intercessions: (Response: Lord, hear our prayer)

Leader: Let us offer our intercessions to the God who has first loved us, and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

That nations with **plentiful resources** may prudently open their borders freely, to those in need, imitating the generous hospitality of God, who shows no partiality, we pray...

That all who by their lives of service, make themselves **friends to those in need**, may be seen as signs of Christ, who laid down his life for his friends, we pray...

That the **neophytes**, called by Christ in baptism and chosen to be friends, may go forth from this Paschal season, to bear fruit that will last, we pray...

For **Jews, Muslims and Christians all** over the world, that, mindful of a common God and a common ancestor in faith, Abraham, they may not give up on their quest for justice and peace, but find ways to live life together with mutual acceptance, forgiveness and love, we pray...

For Pope Francis' universal prayer intention for April: for those who risk their lives while fighting for fundamental rights under dictatorships, authoritarian regimes, and even in democracies in crisis, we pray....

For those who have suffered in various ways from the **Coronavirus**, and those who died from it, we pray...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)

*O God, it is not that we have loved you, but that you have first loved us,
and sent your only Son into the world, so that we might live through Christ.
Teach us, by your Spirit, to live as the Lord's true friends,
and to love one another as Jesus has loved us, knowing that there can be no greater love,
than to lay down one's life for one's friends.
This we ask through Jesus your Son and our Brother. Amen.*

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favors on us today, we pray that we will remain open to your tremendous love for each of us, and extend your love to others, by showing our generous concern for them.

OUR FATHER.....

Celebrating the Word. Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R., deceased 2012). For information: The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA). Email: provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca website: www.resurrectionists.ca