

"I have called you friends"

Reading 1: Act 10: 258-26, 34-35, 44-48

Reading 2: 1 John 4: 7 – 10

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 97: 1 - 4

Gospel Reading : John 15: 9 – 17

Scripture John 15: 9-17 : As the Father has loved me, so have I 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another.

Meditation : Jesus defines friendship - the mutual bond of trust and affection which people choose to have for one another - as the willingness to give totally of oneself - even to the point of laying down one's life for a friend. How is such love possible or even desirable? God made us in love for love. That is our reason for being, our purpose for living, and our goal in dying.

God is the source and origin of love - divine and human : Scripture tells us that *God is love* (1 John 4:8) - and everything he does flows from his immense love for us. He loved us so much - far beyond what we could ever expect or deserve - that he was willing to pay any price to redeem us from our slavery to sin and death. That is why the Father sent us his beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up his life as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. In this great exchange - the Father giving up his Son to death on the cross in order to give us abundant everlasting life and adopt us as his beloved sons and daughters in Christ (Romans 8:14-17).

God's love has been poured into our hearts : It is for this reason that we can take hold of a hope that does not fade and a joy that does not diminish because *God has poured his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Romans 5:5). God's love is not limited or subject to changing circumstances. It is an enduring love that has power to change and transform us to be like him - merciful, gracious, kind, forgiving, and steadfast in showing love not only for our friends, but for our enemies as well. God's love is boundless because he is the source of abundant life, perfect peace, and immeasurable joy for all who open their hearts to him. That is why Jesus came to give us abundant life through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit.

A new way of loving and serving one another : Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment - a new way of loving and serving one another. Jesus' love was wholly directed toward the good of others. He loves them for their sake and for their welfare. That is why he willingly laid down his own life for us to free us from sin, death, fear, and everything that could separate us from the love of God. Our love for God and our willingness to lay down our life for others is a response to the exceeding love God has given us in Christ. Paul the Apostle states,

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35,38-39).

Friendship with God : Jesus calls his disciples his friends. Jesus not only showed his disciples that he personally cared for them and sought their welfare. He personally enjoyed their company and wanted to be with them. He ate with them, shared everything he had with them - even his inmost heart and thoughts. And he spent himself doing good for them. To know Jesus personally is to know God and the love and friendship he offers to each one of us. One of the special marks of favour shown in the Scriptures is to be called the *friend of God*. Abraham is called the *friend of God* (Isaiah 41:8, James 2:23). God spoke with Moses as a man speaks with his friend (Exodus 33:11). Jesus, the Lord and Master, calls the disciples his friends rather than his servants. What does it mean to be a friend of God? Friendship with God certainly entails a loving relationship which goes beyond mere duty and obedience. Jesus' discourse on friendship and brotherly love echoes the words of Proverbs: *A friend loves at all times; and a brother is born for adversity* (Proverbs 17:17). The distinctive feature of Jesus' relationship with his disciples was his personal love for them. *He loved his own to the end* (John 13:1). His love was unconditional and wholly directed to the good of others. His love was also sacrificial. He gave the best he had and all that he had. He gave his very life for those he loved in order to secure for them everlasting life with the Father.

Love to the death : The Lord Jesus gives his followers a new commandment - a new way of love that goes beyond giving only what is required or what we think others might deserve. What is the essence of Jesus' new commandment of love? It is a love to the death - a purifying love that overcomes selfishness, fear, and pride. It is a total giving of oneself for the sake of others - a selfless and self-giving love that is oriented towards putting the welfare of others ahead of myself. Jesus says that there is no greater proof in love than the sacrifice of one's life for the sake of another. Jesus proved his love by giving his life for us on the cross of Calvary. Through the shedding of his blood for our sake, our sins are not only washed clean, but new life is poured out for us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. We prove our love for God and for one another when we embrace the way of the cross. When my will crosses with God's will, then God's will must be done. Do you know the peace and joy of a life fully surrendered to God and consumed with his love? The Lord Jesus tells us that he is our friend and he loves us whole-heartedly and unconditionally. He wants us to love one another just as he loves us, whole-heartedly and without reserve. His love fills our hearts and transforms our minds and frees us to give ourselves in loving service to others. If we open our hearts to his love and obey his command to love our neighbour, then we will bear much fruit in our lives, fruit that will last for eternity. Do you wish to be fruitful and to abound in the love of God?

Questions for Community Faith Sharing:

1. What is the greatest act of love which one can give for the sake of another?
2. The first reading today proclaims that "God shows no partiality." The second declares that "God is love," do you exclude anyone from your love or your prayers? Why?
3. What is the cross in your life today?

"Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Prayer of Ignatius Loyola)