

6th Sunday of Easter

May 9-10, 2015

Readings: Acts 10:25-48; 1 John 4:7-10; John 15:9-17

“As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.” At one time or another, we have all had questions thrown our way that stopped us in our tracks. I can still remember the question from the inquisitive High School student as if it were yesterday, even though it was nearly twenty-five years ago. He asked, “Father, what would happen if when you died, you discovered that everything for which you had worked as a priest turned out to be wrong... then, how would you feel?” Given his serious tone, I did not see this as a “gotcha” question, but one from a student honestly searching for answers, asking one of life’s “big” questions.

The college philosophy major in me wanted to reject the premise of his question, so as not to have to even answer it, but I resisted. How would I feel? I paused briefly before replying: “I wouldn’t change a thing about how I have lived my life or my decision to be a priest.” “But if you knew it was all wrong..?” “No,” I replied with a smile, “my actions would not have been in vain or useless, because I sought to do God’s will and perhaps I made a small difference.”

The life of faith is not a secret club to which only a select few have been invited to enter. Nor is it accomplished in a moment- our life of faith spans our entire lives, and we must be prepared to persevere through all the ups and downs and even moments of doubt.

“Everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.” To know God is pure gift; the gift of faith is precious, it must be protected, not jealously guarded or selfishly kept to oneself. It is not automatic.

The Gospel is reduced to its most basic components today. When we keep God's commandments, we remain in His love; when we remain in His love, we will be experience friendship with God. Our faith assures us that our best efforts and good works are never going to be in vain, even as our faith challenges us to realize that we can indeed lose our salvation through an unrepentant act of mortal sin. It is at the same time a both a comfort and a tremendous challenge.

But this challenge is not designed to cripple us, but rather to motivate us to even better acts of virtue. Our Catechism teaches us that faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to man. In point of fact, we can lose this priceless gift, as St. Paul indicated to St. Timothy: "Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith." ¹

How tragic it is for someone to lead a good life, but then to turn away through an act or series of acts that makes vain that which went before. Countless good works and deeds can be rendered vain through these failures. We must see this 'shipwreck' as a possibility, and not fall prey to the false notion that we have won the race before we reach the finish line. True, it is a delicate balance, for we are certainly not called to lead our lives in absolute fear and dread. We are called to radiate joy; there is a reason why the Easter season is ten days longer than Lent. We are people of hope.

To live, grow, and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must beg the Lord to increase our faith, so that abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church, we will be ever ready to lay down our lives for the sake of Christian charity. May God grant us this perseverance so that our joy may truly be complete.

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.#162