

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 5, 2024

My dear friends, our today's Scripture passages declare the profound truth that those who believe in Christ are to obey his commandment of love – "Love one another as I have loved you."

In the first reading, Peter teaches us that God shows no partiality in His love and that there are no boundaries to abiding in love. God loves everyone, both the Jews and the Gentiles, and He wants everyone to be saved through His son, Jesus. That is why God welcomed the Roman centurion Cornelius as the first non-Jew to become a Christian.

In the second reading, John defines God as love and explains that He expressed His love for mankind by sending His son to die for us "as expiation for our sins." This Divine love gives us the command, and the duty, to love one another as we have been loved by God. Since God has loved us first, we can and should love God in return, by loving one another.

After telling the parable of the vine and branches, Jesus, in today's Gospel, teaches the disciples that they are to obey his commandment of love just as Jesus has obeyed his Heavenly Father's will by fulfilling His commandments and remaining inseparably bonded with his Father. Jesus' unconditional, forgiving, selfless and sacrificial love for us must be the criterion of our love for others.

**"Whoever is without love does not know God . . ."**

If you've ever sat through a performance review you know that they can go a number of different ways. Sometimes they can be short and sweet, the kind that simply take a minute or two and end with, "Nice job. Keep doing what you're doing. Sign here." Others can be very detailed and take a long time. These are the kinds in which the supervisor has both a copy of the job description and the list of expectations and demands of the particular position right in front of him or her. He or she goes through the

list one by one, making comments on each item along the way. Hopefully, the person being evaluated knew in advance what those expectations were, and therefore isn't expecting any surprises.

But there is another kind of performance review, the kind in which things get mentioned about which the employee is completely in the dark, things the boss is unhappy about but which the employee had no idea were even part of the job. These situations can be really frustrating because the employee felt he or she was being evaluated on certain things, only to find out that the supervisor was evaluating some other things of which the employee was entirely unaware. "I didn't even know that was my responsibility," he or she might say.

I didn't even know that was my responsibility . . .

My dear people of God, what do you think the job description for being a Christian is? I guess this is something we may have never considered. What exactly would that list look like? Would it be long? Or short? And how about specifically for a Catholic? Does that alter the list? Or is it pretty much the same for all Christians? Put another way, what are God's expectations of you and me? What are we on for?

Folks, do you ever wonder if over the past two thousand years, we, the Catholic community of faith have made things a little too complicated? Would those first believers, those first followers of Jesus even recognize us as being of the same community as them? Or would they be a little confused by what they saw and heard and experienced?

I ask those questions not for us to unfairly question what the Church has become, or to make any of you wonder if we as a Church have evolved into something we should not have. That's not my intention at all. In fact, the way I feel about the Church is quite the opposite. I love the Liturgy. I love the Sacraments. I love Catholic devotions. I love the honor and respect we give the Saints. I love the pageantry of our celebrations and our beautiful churches and our religious art and the expressions of

Catholic ideas in books and in films and in song. I love all of them. It truly has been and continues to be a treasure for me on my faith journey. In many ways, I can't imagine my life without it.

But I ask those questions for a different reason. You see, sometimes I wonder if the richness of the Church, the countless opportunities it provides us to encounter our God, the many opportunities for us to let God pour his very life into us, that is, grace us with his goodness and mercy and compassion don't somehow tempt us into confusing what the job description of a Catholic truly is. Please think for a minute. If we were sitting across from God in a performance review, what would he say? What would he be evaluating?

Would it be . . . .

How many Masses we attended?

How many prayers we said?

How many devotions we participated in?

How many parish activities we went to?

How often we read our Bible?

Whether or not we followed our Lenten regulations?

How much money we gave to our parish?

Are those really the benchmarks? Are those at the top of the list of what God expects from us as Catholics or Christians? Are those the most important things when all is said and done? In other words, are those what provide evidence of faithfulness?

Or would God be evaluating something altogether different?

I think you know the answer.

**“Whoever is without love does not know God . . . .”**

My dear friends, sometimes it's easy for us, as Catholics, to forget the obvious when it comes to following Jesus. It's easy for us to mistake the job description for something it is not, or to scramble the order to such a degree that we place things at the top of the list that should be much further down or in some cases, maybe should not be on the list at all.

You see, in a very real sense, there is really only one item on the job description, one thing which, if it is not at the TOP of the list, renders the others on the list relatively unimportant. And you know well what that one thing is: LOVE. Love is what we are to be about. Love is really our only responsibility. Love is what God wants and expects and demands, not because HE needs it, but because every single person on this Earth needs it, the whole world needs it, you need it and so do I. WE need it both to give it and to receive it.

Everything else I mentioned above, all those good, holy, meaningful, and worthwhile things - things you and I love dearly are important only to the degree to which they help us be better lovers - help us love more, love unconditionally, love continuously without counting the cost.

And so, as we give thanks to God for our faith and for our Church, the ark that often provides us safety and security as we cross the difficult waters of life, let's never forget what true faithfulness is all about, never confuse the means to the end with the end itself.

It's all about love - because God is love.

Without love, what we do is diminished, somewhat empty, without real or lasting meaning. But when we live with love, in love, and for love, we can be assured that God will look upon us and be pleased with what he sees. And say to us at end of our life:

Well done, good and faithful servant.

I believe that's a performance review we should all hope to receive at God's own time.