

Theme: What a Friend we have in Jesus!

Text: John 15:9-17

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

My fellow redeemed; on this sixth Sunday of Easter we meditate in how Great is the Love of our friend Jesus; our God. As well on this day we remember Mother's Day, which remind us of Mother Church. Who births us by adoption into Jesus' with Baptism, who always has a Meal spread at the Blessed Table. Mom's must give the basic needs - love, protection, security, advice, encouragement and food. They are modeled after the Church, the Mother of all Jesus' believers. Mothers live by word and example, like the Church, strong in faith, long in patience over how her children live.

Wouldn't it be great if all mothers, all people, recognized Jesus in the Word and Sacraments? That all would forsake denial and bask in the true peace and joy of the Lord? Well, that's why we are here. We speak, teach, and witness the truth of the Scriptures that we may lead others to Baptism and Communion. As we live our lives, we share the Truth with the foolish and slow of heart that our Lord puts us into contact with, whether they be our children, distant relatives, friends, strangers, and even, those offended by the scandal of Christ crucified.

People know us, as Christians, by our love, by Christ in us, hidden. As we consume Christ, we are consumed by Him, hearts aflame, seeing, eating and departing in peace. And this love of God is what we are going to meditate this morning. If there is something that we could compare, here on earth, with the love of God is the love of mothers toward us. Yes, the love of parents, adopted parents, mothers, fathers, aunts, grandparents which is not perfect when compared with the love of God.

In our Gospel of today, there are few things that Jesus tells His disciples. And one of these things that Jesus tells His disciples is that they are not longer His servants, but His friends. My grandmother who raised me always told me: "Tell me who your friends are and I will tell who you are". Without doubt we have heard this saying, and to some extent it is true.

In certain degree our friends have a great influence on us. If we walk with people who are honest, hardworking, and respectful it is probably we are like them. But if we walk with people who are dishonest, corrupt, disrespectful it is more likely that their behaviour could affect us, and we end up being like them. Because of that many times parents encourage our children to choose our friends in order to avoid problems in the future.

No doubt for the life of the disciples Jesus was a positive influence for them. Jesus' influence changed them forever. However, the text also emphasizes that Jesus initiated this friendship. He tells them "You did not choose me, but I chose you." Was there anything in them that moved Jesus to choose them? Had

they done something to deserve His friendship? We do not know all the details in how this relationship started, but what we know is that Jesus began this relationship. Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John while they were fishing. Jesus, as well, called Matthew when He was sitting at a table collecting taxes, and He called Philip and Nathanael without any merit from their part.

According to the Gospels, one thing that characterized the ministry of Jesus was that He walked with people considered by their countrymen as "sinners", like tax collectors and prostitutes. Many criticized Jesus for that, perhaps they had in mind the saying, "Tell me who your friends are and I will tell who you are".

They thought that in order to be righteous in the sight of God all people must be good, like them. So they stayed away from all those "bad people." They condemned, rejected, and avoided all contact with them. Their reasoning was that if "these bad people" wanted to be accepted in their midsts they have to change and become like them, without sin. But we know that "there is no one who seeks God." Rom. 3:11. And that "we all has sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Ro. 3:23. So they and those "bad people" were sinners as well. And Jesus knew very well this, and He did not accept this way of thinking.

Instead, Jesus acted completely contrary to the way of the Pharisees. Jesus way of thinking was, "First let me accept you and give you my friendship without conditions, and then my Word will change you." So this way of thinking made changes in the disciples, and others who followed Jesus.

Jesus' words in the Gospel of today say: "love one another as I have loved you." Psychologists tell us that one of the most basic truths of human existence is that a person can only love others if you had received love at home. There are many pastors that have worked with individuals and families with many problems in their relations. They have noticed that almost always these people hardly have known love in their lives.

No doubt we have known children that have been abused by their parents. As well parents who have been abused by their children, but this morning I will talk about those children who have not received love in their life. These children have been rejected, criticized, and punished all the time. When we know about what those parents we feel anger toward them; but when we hear the stories of these parents we realize that they were raised without love as children. This is a vicious circle that needs to be change and only God's Word can make this change.

My friends in Christ; when we have not received love we cannot give it to others. In order to love we need to be loved first. But, even when people who suppose to love us do not do it, we can be sure that someone indeed loves us; God, and His Son Jesus Christ. That is what Jesus taught, both in words and deeds.

The Epistle to the Romans 5:8 say "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." These words that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome teach us that God did what was best for us in spite of the fact that we hated Him. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that the love He has for us is the same love that He, as God the Son, shares with God the Father.

In today's Gospel Jesus takes ἀγάπη (love) all the way when He says, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." Jesus did more than talk about laying down His life for His friends.

Even while Jesus was teaching His disciples with the words of today's Gospel, Judas was on his way to the authorities. He would soon lead soldiers to Jesus in Gethsemane. There Judas would betray Jesus. The very next day, Jesus would fulfill His very description of love with His own suffering and death on the cross. He would endure not only death, but also the anger of God at all of our sins. This is the love that saves us.

Jesus said, "Abide in my love." This is the love of the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. This is the great love that lays down life for a friend. This is the love of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is the love of the God-man who stood between God and us and took the full force of the wrath of God for us. This is the love that bled on the cross and said, (Luke 23:34) "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." This is the love that rose from the dead and promises us eternal life.

Jesus said, "Abide in my love." Abide means remain; stop trying in your own power. The Holy Spirit has placed us in Christ Jesus through the gift of faith. Any work we do on our own only serves to reject that faith and expel us from Christ's love. Abiding in God's love means that He will work in us to strengthen our faith toward Him and He will work through us to show fervent love toward our brothers and sisters. God loves us unconditionally. He is the only source of pure, unconditional, ἀγάπη - love. It is in this love that God created us and still sustains us. It is this love that compelled the Son of God to assume a human nature and sacrifice Himself on the cross to save us from sin. It is in this love that we abide by faith.

Just as God's love raised Christ from the dead, it promises that He will be with us here on this earth and that we shall be with Him forever in heaven. By faith this love works in us and through us to free us so that we can obey God's command and love our brother and sister even as God has loved us.

Jesus always treated people in love and He expects from us to treat others in the same manner. Jesus says "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Jesus' new mandate to His disciples is to receive His love in all the ways He has to give, to be loved by Him so that His love would flow through them to one another. His love poured out for you in His death, poured into you in His Baptism and His Supper, bears fruit as His love

has its way with you. The same body and blood that bent down as a servant to wash the feet of His disciples, now bends your body down to wash the soiled feet of one another, cleansing one another, forgiving one another, loving one another.

"By this all will know that you are my disciples, when you have love for one another," say Jesus. By the fruit hanging on the branches, you will know the Vine whose life flows through them. We do not love in order to be loved by God. Jesus loved us to death, before we loved Him. While we were yet His enemies, He loved us and laid down His life for us. We love one another because we already are loved by God in Jesus Christ. His Baptism, His Body and Blood, testify to you that you are loved by God in Jesus Christ. Receive His love that you may love one another as He has loved you. That is His mandate. In Jesus' Holy Name. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.