

Meditations: Sunday of the Sixth Week of Easter (Year B)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this Easter season. The topics are: loving one another; God never abandons us; guided by the Holy Spirit.

- Loving one another
- God never abandons us
- Guided by the Holy Spirit

AS THE Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love (Jn 15:9).

With these words, Jesus bid farewell to his own shortly before the Passion. He said those words knowing that his listeners would abandon Him to his fate within a few hours.

Nevertheless, he desired to etch them deeply into their hearts so that, once the bitter taste of betrayal had passed, this certainty would be the sustenance of their apostolic life: *No longer do I call you servants [...]; instead, I have called you friends* (Jn 15:15). This wonderful friendship requires our freedom, certainly, but the initiative is his. He looked at each of us lovingly and chose us (cf. Jn 15:16) because *he loved us* first (1 Jn 4:10).

You are my friends if you do what I command you (Jn 15:14). This is the secret to staying with Jesus and holding fast to his friendship. The apostles did not need to ask Jesus which commandments to observe that evening, because He offered

them the answer directly: *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends (Jn 15:12-13).* They knew the way Jesus loved because they had experienced it firsthand. Each of them could have told any number of stories about their personal relationship with our Lord and about the patience and affection with which He cared for the other people they saw come to Him. They knew that Jesus was ready to do anything for those He loved.

On the night that marked the beginning of his painful passion, the Lord established a new law of love that his disciples are invited to live. The measure of that love is revealed on the Cross: “Love is now no longer a mere ‘command;’ it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.”^[1] Furthermore, He

sends us to bring the Good News of his love to the world: *I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last (Jn 15:16)*. We fulfill this mission if we learn to love as He does, by offering our lives for others, bringing his joy to our friends and acquaintances *so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete (Jn 15:11)*.

GOD IS love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them (1 Jn 4:16). This is how St. John defines God's essence. "Even if nothing more were said in praise of love," says St. Augustine says, "throughout all the pages of Sacred Scripture, and we heard only from the mouth of the Holy Spirit that 'God is love,' we should seek nothing more."^[2] One of the first steps on the path of faith is to believe that God's

love for each one of us is indestructible. “*We have come to believe in God's love*: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life.”^[3]

We can say, in a way, that it is impossible for Him to stop loving us: that is his weakness.

As Jesus' friends, we are called to live with Him and in Him, and we receive *life through him* (1 Jn 4:9). We experience what the apostles did: when we lose sight of Him and forget his love, we feel lost, like withered branches. We need to be close to the Lord, to rest our heads on his chest, like the apostle John. However, we also know that even if we abandon him – as we often do out of weakness – He will come to seek us again quickly, like He did with his disciples after the Resurrection. Our God “runs toward us,” opening his arms and offering his grace to forgive any offense, because “men do not

scandalise God. He can put up with all our infidelities.”^[4]

We are nearing the end of Easter. From this Sunday onwards, the liturgy will focus on the arrival of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus promised to his disciples. The Son had to return to the Father. He will no longer be visibly with them, but he assures them that they need not be troubled, for he will not leave them orphaned. *The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you (Jn 14:25).* After the marvelous experience of three years of life with Christ, his absence would be unbearable without the consolation of his Spirit, and the extraordinary mission that He was leaving in their hands would be impossible.

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THE BOOK of the Acts of the Apostles, which we have been reading at Mass during Easter, narrates the story of evangelization in the years following Pentecost. It is sometimes called the “gospel of the Holy Spirit” because it shows us the wonders wrought by Him in the nascent Church. The Holy Spirit inspired apostolic audacity and put words full of power on their lips, while also moving the hearts of those who listened to them. He presided over decisions about the future of the Church and traced the path of the apostles, guiding, moving, or stopping them. His love was the joy and security of persecuted Christians. The Spirit, who fully filled the soul of Christ, also filled the hearts of his “friends,” revealing to them the wisdom that comes from God. He encouraged and sanctified them.

Pentecost was not just a surprising event one Sunday in Jerusalem. The

Holy Spirit filled the whole life of the early community. He continues to guide the Church today and can guide our hearts. In the story of Cornelius' conversion, the Holy Spirit leads Peter to the centurion's house. *The Spirit said to him, 'Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them'* (Acts 10:19-20). When he arrived at the house, while Peter was preaching, the gift of the Spirit was poured out on that Gentile family, causing them to *speak in tongues and extol God's greatness*. Everyone was surprised to see that the Holy Spirit made no distinction between Jews or Gentiles. Even Peter was amazed. *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* (Acts 10:47-48).

The Holy Spirit is God's gift, renewing our love and our desire to serve Christ. He is love making love grow. His arrival surprises us, sometimes because it is unexpected, and at other times because of the intensity of his intervention. His presence renews our faith and hope, strengthens the love in our hearts, and makes joy and goodness easier to grasp and share with the people around us. In the Collect prayer of this Sunday's Mass, we ask God "that what we relive in remembrance we may always hold to in what we do." We can ask Mary to teach us to stay with her Son, trusting the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

[1] Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, no. 1.

[2] St. Augustine, *In Epist. Ioann. ad Parth.*, 7,4.

[3] Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, no. 1.

[4] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 64.

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