

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

6th Sunday of Easter | For Sunday, May 9, 2021

Dare To Go to the Fringes

Written by Bro. Silas Henderson, SDS

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

1 John 4:7-10

John 15:9-17



"This I command you: love one another."

—John 15: 17

Prior to becoming a member of the [Society of the Divine Savior \(the Salvatorians\)](#), I was a [Benedictine](#) monk for more than a decade. As a monk, I was immersed in the very practical wisdom of Saint Benedict and the Rule he wrote for his monks more than fourteen hundred years ago. One of the defining characteristics of this great saint was his balanced understanding of the human person and of community dynamics. We see this at work in the third chapter of his Rule and his insistence that the abbot of the monastery call the community together whenever there was important business to discuss: "Let the Abbot call together the whole community and state the matter to be acted upon... The reason we have said that all should be called for counsel is that the Lord often reveals to the younger what is best."

In a sense, we see the same wisdom was at work in the First Reading of this Sunday's Mass.

Recall how in the *Acts of the Apostles*, Saint Luke presented that first generation of believers as living an almost idyllic existence, devoting themselves to the Apostles' teachings, "and the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need" ([2:42, 44-45](#)). But this way of life was short-lived. After a short time, those first Christians faced persecution and wrestled with questions of inclusivity and what should be expected of the growing number non-Jewish believers. While this might seem

like a small issue for us today, this all-important question threatened to tear the Church apart. Recognizing what was at stake, the community had to come together to discern how to respond to the challenges they faced.

So, what did the leaders of the Church do? They brought together members with different perspectives and values, prayed, debated, and listened to one another. Together they discerned how the Holy Spirit was at work in the Church — just as Jesus had promised it would be.

In the end, rather than closing ranks and opting to exclude those who might not comfortably fit within the community, the Church's first leaders imagined a new way forward and began to welcome Gentiles into the community of believers. ([This Sunday's story of Peter and Cornelius the centurion](#) is an important early example of this inclusivity.) Humbly recognizing both their own limitations and opportunities before them, the leaders looked beyond the enclosed circle of the original believers to welcome those who many believed couldn't or shouldn't be included within the Church.

This willingness to "look beyond the boundaries" was held up as the ideal for the Church by Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio only days before he was Pope in 2013. In a speech delivered during the "general congregations" preceding the conclave, he said: "Evangelizing pre-supposes a desire in the Church to come out of herself. The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also in the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance, and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery." As Pope Francis, he has continued to call Christians to move "beyond the boundaries," in his Apostolic Exhortation [Exsultate et Gaudete](#):

"God is eternal newness. He impels us constantly to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar, to the fringes and beyond. He takes us to where humanity is most wounded, where men and women, beneath the appearance of a shallow conformity, continue to seek an answer to the question of life's meaning. God is not afraid! He is fearless! He is always greater than our plans and schemes. Unafraid of the fringes, he himself became a fringe (cf. [Phil 2:6-8](#); [Jn 1:14](#)). So if we dare to go to the fringes, we will find him there; indeed, he is already there. Jesus is already there, in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded flesh, in their troubles and in their profound desolation. He is already there" (no. 135).

In the end, what's at stake in all of this is the fundamental mission of the Church: to proclaim and live the love of God through acts of service and to love one another after the example of

Jesus. Like Benedict's monks and the Apostles, each of us is called to do our part in realizing this mission, but we are also called to reach across the boundaries — whatever form they might take — and invite others to join us in living out this mission.

Bro. Silas Henderson, SDS

PRAYER

Grant, almighty God,
that we may celebrate with heartfelt devotion
these days of joy,
which we keep in honor of the risen Lord,
and that what we relive in remembrance
we may always hold to in what we do.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(from *The Roman Missal*)