

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 9, 2021

Year B RCL

Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98; John 15:9-17

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.”

By: The Rev. Fr. Fabian Villalobos

We can say with full conviction that when Jesus was saying goodbye to his disciples after washing their feet at the Last Supper and before his arrest, he was exercising his divine attributes. In the verse, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”, Jesus anticipates the future events that conclude on the cross where in obedience, Jesus will lay down his own life for his friends. In order to understand more how the cross and the resurrection guide all Jesus’ existence, it is necessary for us to go back to the Fourth Sunday of Easter on Good Shepherd Sunday when we hear Jesus saying: “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to

take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.” John 10
17-18

This statement shows the extreme connection between Jesus and the Father and demonstrates that the offer and sacrifice of Jesus’ own life is an act of obedience and love to the Father and ultimately to his friends. What makes today’s gospel unique for us is that Jesus instructs us in the quantity and quality of the love he has for his disciples when he told them, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you”. This is the same kind of love that the Father has shown and given to Jesus and it is the love Jesus gives to his disciples. “As the Father..., so I have”, means that it is absolutely the same and only way of love Jesus knows from the Father. The way how the Father communicates and relates with Jesus is the same way how Jesus shares to include and treat his disciples.

In continuity with last week’s gospel, today again we hear “abide in my love” as the requisite of our relationship with Jesus. The difference this Sunday is that Jesus explains exactly what is expected from us and what we need to do to abide in his love: “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.” Often people criticize Christianity because it does not tell people what to do or how to do it. People want to be free to do as they please

and at the same time they want someone to tell them what they need to do. Jesus, in teaching his disciples that the manner to abide in his love is through keeping and obeying his commandments, is demonstrating how much he knows our human nature.

There is no excuse, not even half acceptance, in front of God the Father; we need to be like Jesus. “Just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love”, demonstrates again that the standard of obedience in Jesus’ life is that he always kept the Father’s commandments and is permanently committed all the way to the end. One of the dramas we can have as Christians is being occasional believers, seeking God particularly when something is going wrong or we need God’s help. Or we may be living the commandments with intermittence and without full commitment. More and more people display the desire to live the Christian life on their own personal terms. For this reason, the conditional, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” is clearly stated and Jesus’ teaching manifests that there is no room for personal interpretation. Only with keeping the commandments, we are and remain in Jesus’ presence and in full communion with him.

After talking about keeping the commandments, Jesus said: “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” That *his* joy may be in us. Could you for a moment imagine: What is Jesus’ joy? How our own joy needs to be complete and full? Jesus knows that in imitating him in his obedience, while he keeps the Father’s commandments and as we keep Jesus’ commandments, there is fruitfulness that produces joy. In this verse of the gospel, it is confirmed that our call is to be faithful more than successful. We are faithful each day when we keep and obey the commandments. The reward does not belong to the language of the world, rather it is joy that it is possible to experience only from the inside of the soul. This complete joy is one of the “good things that surpass our understanding” as we hear in the collect prayer and it is possible to attain only when we intentionally work in keeping the commandments.

Once Jesus explains the method (keep my commandments) and the reward (complete joy), he then introduces the main commandment: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” Again, the very standard of love is Jesus himself. “As I have loved you” is not an occasional, fallacious, or unreal love, but a relationship that goes to the extreme of giving all including to lay down his own life. There is much to

learn from this passage of the gospel and from Jesus' example and behavior of love. Later he said, "You are my friends if you do what I command you." Eight times the word love appears as noun or verb in this gospel showing that the accessibility to the mystery of God is revealed when we become friends of God in our actions of love. When we imagine that the Christian life it is about loving others in freedom and authenticity, we hear again Jesus saying: "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." Love is then an expression of our faithfulness, but overall, the fruitfulness like our own existence belongs to God who choose us. We then need to keep and obey the commandments knowing that in doing so we will find the joy that made our life complete. Amen.