

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
May 9, 2021 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *God, in today's first reading, you pour out your Spirit on the Gentiles and remind believers of the command to give and receive your love. Open our hearts as we gather in your name and pour out on us your Holy Spirit and fill us with your love. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: All three readings today highlight God's *initiative* in the world. In the first reading, it is God who launches the Gentile mission in conferring the Spirit upon Cornelius' household. In the familiar Johannine refrain on the primacy of love, the second reading reminds us that it is God who first loves us, and the Gospel says the same in referring to our election as disciples. We do not have to search God out. He comes looking for us.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm, and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

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

This reading is sometimes called the "Gentile Pentecost" because in it is described a powerful act of 'Spirit outpouring' on the Gentiles—previously thought to be excluded from God's plan. When Peter sees God at work in Cornelius, he becomes aware that "*in truth, God shows no partiality.*" If God has accepted the Gentiles into his household, so must the Christian Church. Also, Baptism is seen not so much as a cause of God's love but as a celebration of it.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 98

This psalm takes up the theme of God's universal love that emphatically declares: "*All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God.*"

SECOND READING: 1 John 4:7-10

This reading uses the word *love* nine times. When it comes to speaking about the central mystery of our faith, speaking about who God is, the most important thing we can say about God is that he *is love*.

Then John says an amazing thing: "*whoever loves is begotten of God and knows God.*" This means, among other things, that the person who lives a loving life knows God – even if he/she is a non-believer. Elsewhere, John says: "*where there is love, there is God*". The reverse side of the above truth is that *whoever does not love, does not know God*. This refers to believers who do not live lives of love.

The last verse of the reading underlines another important truth, namely that God loved us way before we ever showed our love for God.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 15: 9-17

The context for this beautiful teaching on love is the Last Supper. Like the second reading today, this reading uses the word love *nine* times.

Jesus makes an amazing statement which we might easily miss. *“I love you disciples with the same intensity of love as my Father loves me.”* Pondering these words could do wonders for us as we struggle to deepen our sense of God’s love for us. Then Jesus says: *Remain in my love.* Even though Jesus will be physically separated from his disciples by his death, they can still experience his love by *remaining in his love and by keeping his commandments.* Jesus summed up *all* the commandments in one word, namely, *love:* love of God, love of neighbor and love of self.

The *sacrificial* dimension of love is also stressed here. Laying down one’s life for another is the greatest form of love. This word of Jesus has to be very consoling for all those who day after day care for loved ones, for the sick and for those who live on the margins of society. Finally, the reading underlines God’s initiative when it comes to our relationship with him. God is always seeking a relationship with us when we show little or no interest in him.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. In Jesus’ time, the Gentiles were considered as “them” and the Jews as “us.” In our time, name some of the groups considered as “them.” If we really see the “them people” as part of God’s household, to what extent would we continue to view them as “them”?
3. *“As the Father loves me, so do I love you.”* How can these awesome words of Jesus transform our lives?
4. Do you tend to believe that you have to earn God’s love? If so, why? How hard is it for you to believe that God loves us just as we are with all our sins and failures?
5. What can help to deepen our sense of God’s unconditional love for us?
6. Name 1 thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed/ act on.

JOURNALING

Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: Dear Jesus, I know that I do not love myself or others as you love us, please help me to love like you so my joy may be complete.

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion:

Take action on the “us” and “them” issues. Pray for “them.” Defend “them” when they are spoken about in an uncharitable way.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray especially that you might more fully embrace God’s love for you that you might more fully love.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

PRAYER OF LOVE

I love you, O my God,
and my only desire is to love you
until the last breath of my life.
I love you, O my infinitely lovable God,
and I would rather die loving you,
than live without loving you.
I love you, Lord,
and the only grace I ask is
to love you eternally.
My God, if my tongue cannot
say in every moment that I love you,
I want my heart to repeat it to you
as often as I draw breath. Amen

St. John Vianney

From *Treasury of Prayers* by Father Eamon Tobin

Suggested Reading

On the topic of God’s unconditional love for us, see my book *13 Powerful Ways to Pray*, page 15, *Developing a Positive Image of God and Self*.