

6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER, CYCLE C

Acts 15: 1-2, 22-29 + Psalm 67: 2-8 + Revelations 21: 10-14, 22-23 + John 14: 23-29
Holy Spirit Church: May 26, 2019

In John's Gospel, the Advocate, a title for the Holy Spirit, is the Heavenly Father's love. Pure and simple, the Holy Spirit is the abiding presence of the Father's love.

Of all the Father's attributes, love is the one attribute which communicates the divine nature perfectly.

In the first letter of John, this truth is stated clearly:

"God is love." (1 John 4:8)

Three words, 9 letters, a short statement packed with beauty and truth and power. God is love.

An encounter with God is an encounter with divine love, which truly is an encounter with God's very own self.

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, is the personification of that divine love.

The 3rd Person of the Holy Trinity is nothing less than the Father's love!

St. Paul says it this way in his letter to the Romans:

"The Love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Romans 5:5)

The baptismal image of this Pauline statement is intentional, because in the waters of baptism, waters symbolizing the life-giving power of the Spirit, the love of God has been poured into us.

The Spirit of love has been given us in baptism.

Divine love for all creation is the golden thread woven throughout the Scriptural writings of St. John.

The evangelist John very carefully traces Jesus' relationship to the Father's love.

In perhaps his most famous passage---John 3:16---the 4th evangelist proclaims why God sent His only Son, not to condemn the world, but to save it.

God's love for a perishing humanity impels the Father to send His Son.

His Son is the embodiment of the Father's love for every single human being the Father has created.

In the powerful miracles in John's Gospel, which are called "signs," Jesus reveals this divine love for humanity.

At the wedding feast in Cana, Jesus changes water into wine so that a newly married couple might know God's super-abundant love for them. (John 2:1-11)
Jesus heals the man born blind so he might not only physically see again but also on a deeper level "see" (know) Jesus as the source of the Father's love. (John 9:1-41)
Jesus summons Lazarus out of the tomb and back to life, not only because of his love for Lazarus, but also because of his love for Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary, who are crushed by sorrow. (John 11: 1-44)
The greatest sign of God's love for humanity in John's Gospel is when Jesus is lifted up on the cross. Everything in the Gospel of John points toward this.

In every Gospel command, Jesus teaches the way to conform one's life to love's example. The high point of his teaching happens at the Last Supper in John. Jesus washes his disciples' feet and then commands his disciples to do the same, to serve each other in love. (John 13: 1-15)
As we heard last week in John's Last Supper discourse, Jesus challenges all his followers to "Love one another as I love you." (John 13: 34)
Later in that same discourse, Jesus points to his sacrifice on the cross as the highest form of self-giving love, by teaching:
"There is no greater love than this—to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15: 13)

The Holy Spirit reminds us of what Jesus did and what He taught. This is a very important role for the Spirit of love--- to gently remind us---this is what love looks like for followers of the One who gave his life away completely in love.

The Spirit of love also has been given to empower us to love as Jesus loves. The Father of all not only loves us into life and the Son not only dies in our place out of love for us, but their Spirit has been poured into our hearts. Why?
So that divine love might be the source of all our thoughts, words, and actions!

We are to live by the power of the Spirit of love, especially in difficult times, such as times of disagreement and conflict. This kind of loving is different from the prevailing culture where people plant themselves in their own camp with like-minded others, claiming absolute truth and righteousness. "I am right and you are wrong. There is no reason to discuss this matter, nor do I need to listen to you or even respect your viewpoint."

Those filled with the Spirit of love approach disagreements and conflicts in a completely different way. Look at the First Council of the Church in the 1st century in Jerusalem for proof.

Here we are given a glimpse into how the early Christians resolved the thorny issue of how to incorporate the pagan Gentiles into the Church.

There were some who said these new converts had to become Jewish first and be circumcised. Ouch!

Paul and Barnabas, as apostles to the Gentiles in Antioch and beyond, heartily disagreed.

So, this 1st Church Council was held to resolve this issue.

What is left out of today's reading from Acts 15 about this 1st Church Council are the verses describing how the leaders debated this issue.

They did so enlivened by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, who gave them the ability to listen to and respect one another, even as they aired their disagreements.

Notice who receives the credit for reaching a decision on how to welcome the Gentile converts into the Church:

"It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us...." (Acts of the Apostles 15: 28)

Gospel love, empowered by the Spirit, makes God present, the God who heals divisions and brings people together.

It is the work of the Evil One to divide and separate people from each other.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to unite and strengthen the bonds of love among people.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love uniting the Father and the Son in the unity of the Trinity, brings us the peace of the Risen Lord Jesus which cannot be taken away from us. As we drink daily of the life-giving waters of the Spirit of love, we rest in the peace which the world cannot give.

By the gift of the Holy Spirit, the early Christians in the 1st Century found peace even in the midst of the conflicts caused by the growing pains of the early Church.

Those 1st Christians also abided in the peace of the Risen Lord even in the face of opposition and violent persecution, because they were rooted in divine love, they were enlivened by the Spirit of love.

May we learn from them and do the same!

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