

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

[Reading I: Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 98:1, 2-3, 3-4](#)

[Reading II: 1 John 4:7-10](#)

[Gospel: John 15:9-17](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/050524.cfm>



Chapter 10 of Acts turns the focus from the early believers of Jewish origin to the rest of humanity. In the verses preceding our passage, Cornelius is introduced. He was a centurion, a commander of about 80 Roman soldiers, stationed in Caesarea, the Roman headquarters for the Judean area. Centurions were required to be able to read and write. He is a "God-fearing" person. In Judaism, this title was given to non-Jews, who believed in the one God and observed the basics of morality. He was a moral person. He has a vision in which God tells him to summon Peter.

Also, preceding our passage, Peter has a vision in which he struggles with eating what was considered unclean under Jewish law. God instructs not to call unclean anything that God has made clean. Those sent by Cornelius arrive and invite him to go to Cornelius's house in Caesarea. Jews did not go to the houses of gentiles, nor did they interact with them for fear of becoming unclean. Because of the vision that he had, Peter goes with the men. Our passage begins there.

When Peter arrives, Cornelius tries to worship him as one sent by God, but Peter refuses any honor by insisting that he is only a human. After they dialogue in a passage not included in the reading, Peter announces a major insight. "God shows no partiality." God invites every human being to share in the saving work of God. This overturns centuries of practice and tradition found in Judaism. They had long held that God had established the covenant with them and only them. Peter now points the early Christian community toward an entirely new mission of bringing the gospel message to every person.

Peter then preaches the good news to those gathered, and the Holy Spirit comes upon them. In the Acts, the reception of the Holy Spirit always involves action. It is not a passive experience. When those gathered in the upper room (Acts 2) received the Spirit, they went to the rooftop to preach. Some experienced some of the gifts of the Spirit that Paul describes in I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. The assumption was that the Spirit impacts a person, and that it is seen in their life. Those who are with Peter are astonished that the Spirit could come upon gentiles.

For Peter, it is a sign that they belong in the Christian community, so he orders them to be baptized. Normally, people were baptized, and then the Holy Spirit came upon them but in this unique circumstance to teach the church, God gave the Spirit as a sign for the church to act. The Spirit's arrival showed that God was doing something new. God's love and desire for salvation of all people, opened a new way of living for the first Christians. The church continues the practice of first baptizing and then praying that the Holy Spirit will come upon those who have entered the Christian community, but God continues to work as God wills in the hearts and lives of people.

This was a major moment in the development of Christianity. It opened the church to people of every nation, race, culture, and location. In the church's history, there have been many struggles over practices and styles in bringing people from diverse

backgrounds together. The Catholic church has tried to honor the various traditions by having different churches or rites in the Catholic Church. Within the Catholic Church, there are twenty-four churches. The Roman Catholic Church is one of these. There are twenty-three other churches that make up the Catholic Church. These are predominately found in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. We all belong to one church and respect the distinct ways other cultures express their faith. We hold the same beliefs and recognize the Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis, as the head of the universal Church. Each person is challenged to respect the diverse practices and expressions of faith, knowing that God is bigger than any one way of celebrating our faith.

The second reading and the gospel touch on the same themes, so they will be reflected upon together. In Greek, there are three words for love: Eros, Philia, and Agape. Eros refers to romantic and sexual love. Philia is brotherly/sisterly, friendship love. It shows common respect and concern for the well-being of those who we know. The city of Philadelphia is named after this "brotherly" love. Both of these expressions of love show a concern and interest in the other person and look to the benefit that I will receive in being involved with the other person. Hopefully, these loves can develop an Agape love in time.

Agape is the way God loves. It is unconditional and entirely focused on the good that it will bring to the other person. It is commonly seen in a parent's care for a young child or in the care of a sick person. It does not seek a benefit but is a laying down of one's life for the good of the other. Jesus manifested this love in giving his life for humanity.

As disciples, Jesus calls us to this kind of love. Because we have experienced this kind of love from God, we are called to love in this way. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus challenges us to "turn the other cheek"; "love your enemies"; "forgive as we have been forgiven." These are the practical aspects of agape love.

Paul further details this in chapter 13 of I Corinthians: "*Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury... It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*" This is one of the reflections for couples preparing for marriage. To live a Christian marriage, these are ideals that need to be pursued.

Jesus calls the disciples "friends." To be a follower of God is not to be a slave or a servant but to be in a relationship with Jesus. There is a dignity in being a friend. As friends, we are to remain in Jesus as Jesus remains in the Father. This unity in relationship is the heart of living the Christian life. Jesus points out that we know that we are in this relationship by keeping the commandments. The commandment in this context refers to the Johannine understanding that has been expressed in the First Letter of John. Disciples are to believe in the resurrection of Jesus and love one another as Jesus has loved them. This implies laying down our lives for one another.

Laying down one's life is not easily done. Jesus calls disciples to ask the Father for what they need. Prayer has a necessary and fundamental place in the life of disciples. No matter how busy one is, prayer is essential to keep one rooted and connected with God, the source of life and mission.

**Themes:**

Love

Jewish ritual purity

Christian service

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

**Reflection Questions:**

What did it mean for Peter to go to the house of Cornelius?

What are examples of, or people who have lain down their lives for others?

How do you “remain” in God?

What does it mean for you to be a friend of God? What do you expect a friend of God to do?

**Suggestions for Prayer:**

For the Church: that, as friends of Jesus, we may love as Jesus loved, welcome all whom God calls into our community, and be instruments of healing in the world

For openness to change: that our hearts may be attentive to the Holy Spirit, who continues to lead us to change through growth and new opportunities

For unity in the Body of Christ: that God will help members of the Church reconcile the divisions that exist over differing traditions and grant us a deeper understanding of the values that each person holds

For greater trust and collaboration: that God will show us ways to work together in sharing the Good News and in breaking down the barriers that divide believers from different races, cultures, and social standing

For wisdom and understanding: that God will teach us how best to love and support those to whom we are committed so that we may nurture and encourage them into fuller life

For the courage to lay down our lives for one another: that we may allow God to cleanse us of pride and strengthen us to love as Jesus did