

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER [B]

St. John 15:9-17

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Wichita, Kansas

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! ***He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

In last week's Gospel we heard Jesus' words of declaration: "*I am the vine, you are the branches*" (Jn 15:5). That is an incredible ***promise*** spoken by our Lord to us. And it is the very foundation of our lives as Christians. We are ***in*** Jesus, and ***he*** is ***in us***.

Today's Gospel then speaks about our relationships ***with others***. Jesus commands us, "*Love one another, as I have loved you*" (Jn 15:12).

How can the Lord ***command*** us to love? Doesn't love simply ***happen***? Don't you just ***fall*** in love?

This command of our Lord is puzzling, only if we equate love — as many do today — with a ***feeling***. Because of course, you cannot command a feeling. We don't ***choose*** our feelings for today. We don't ***plan*** our feelings for tomorrow. Feelings are emotions, and they aren't entirely under our control.

When Jesus ***commands*** us to ***love***, he is not commanding us to "have warm feelings" for others. Real love, the love of which Christ speaks, is ***not*** a feeling, but an act of the ***will*** — a ***decision*** — a ***commitment to act*** for the benefit of another — regardless of how you ***feel*** about the person. Here Christ is commanding us to love others — even those we don't particularly like. Christian love is an ***action*** — a commitment — to ***do*** whatever will serve another person, whether we like that individual or not.

The confusion of "loving" and "liking" causes many problems today. For instance, if we identify marital "love" with romance — with an emotional state — is that a realistic basis for a lifelong marriage? Is the degree of emotional attraction between two people a guarantee of fidelity? Can anybody guarantee or predict how they will ***feel*** tomorrow? Are you willing to base your life on another person's emotions? That would be like trying to build a house on a foundation of sand. When feelings — emotions — start to change, does that mean that the marriage is at an end? Or could that signal the beginning of a new, more mature and honest relationship?

Likewise, if we identify our life with Christ with an ***emotional*** experience or ***feeling***, what happens when that emotion or when those feelings pass — as they invariably do? Do we then cease to be a disciple? Does a lack of fervor, or a lack of excitement, mean that the Holy Spirit is no longer with you? If you don't ***feel*** anything special, does that mean that your Baptism into Christ somehow slipped

away? Or, could it possibly be the start of a *more mature relationship* with Jesus — a relationship that is *not* dependent having a particular emotional high?

Perhaps the kind of love our Lord Jesus is commanding is more akin to parental love — the kind of love a mother or father has for their children in a healthy family. Consider that a mother or father will sometimes become frustrated with their children. The parent may become angry even. The parent may not like the way a child is behaving. But that does *not* mean that they stop *loving* their child — which is to say, it does not mean they stop working and acting for the good of their child.

If we love only those who love us back (Mt 5:46), Jesus asks: How is that deserving of praise? How is that love distinctively “Christian”? Even the tax collectors and Gentiles love in that fashion. Again, true love — love as Jesus speaks of it — is a *decision* — an *action* — to seek the good of another whether we like them or not. If we wait for some people to become agreeable or likeable, we might well wait forever. So Jesus says that we are to love one another *as he has loved us*.

When we struggle with loving another person who irritates us, then we do well to consider our Lord Jesus’ love for us. And think not only of his cross, but also of the his dealing with you *now*. He cares for you, *today*. He continues to support and forgive you. No matter what you may have done, he acknowledges you as one of his own, and he seeks to correct and move you, to maturity in your life with him.

If we read today’s Gospel by seeing love as a *commitment* and a *mission*, then a new world of Christ-like living opens up for us. In a time when people are governed so much by emotion and feelings, today’s Gospel calls us as Christ’s followers to something more *solid*, something more *mature*, and something more *beneficial* — to work for the well-being of our neighbor — again, regardless of whether or not we like them.

And today’s Gospel contains one statement that is the key to genuine holiness, the key to entering the very life, and mind, and work of Christ. Jesus declares: “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit*” (v.16a).

The late Swedish bishop, Bo Giertz, writes these words about today’s Gospel:

*We often believe that the most important aspect in Christianity is to “decide for yourself”...
So if someone wants to become a Christian,
it means he has “made a decision for Jesus”
and... “chosen to follow Jesus.”*

But this isn't reality.

*Jesus says **He** is the One who has **chosen us**.*

Already before the foundations of the world were laid...

*God **chose [you]** to be His [child].*

Long before [you] were even born,

Christ died so all [your] sins would be forgiven.

Long before [you] could ever fathom what was happening, Jesus

came and laid His hand on [you] in Baptism

*and **chose [you]** to be His [disciple].*

And when [you] forget Him,

He is the one who seeks [you] out

and is close to [you],

long before [you] see Him.

[Jesus] says that to "abide in His love" (Jn 15:10)

*means, first and foremost, to **receive** His love*

and let it fill us.

Then we can love for His sake, and that is what He wants.

*He said this **not** to put a burden on us*

and compel us to do our duty,

sighing and puffing and worrying

because we aren't prepared.

*He said this so **His joy will live in us**...*

*the great **joy** of living in a world*

whose innermost nature is [mercy], forgiveness, and love.

*It's the **joy** of knowing that Christ has made it possible*

even for the greatest sinner...to be God's child.

*It's the **joy** of knowing*

there is nothing that can separate us from God

when we trust in Jesus.

—To Live with Christ, pp.326-327

Bishop Giertz then closes his meditation with this prayer:

I take your hand, my Lord and my Savior,

and won't let go of it.

Even if I become tired and have difficulty holding on to it,

*I know **You won't let go of me**.*

You came to look for me

because You wanted me to be Your disciple.

And when You say You chose me

*to go out into the world and bear fruit, fruit that lasts,
then I can believe it.*

*My only prayer is that **Your will** be done.*

May it be as You willed when You gave me this life.

Blessed are You

*because this is **Your** undertaking and not mine. Amen*

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! ***He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

In the name of the Father, and of the ✝ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.