

Homily for Easter 6, Year B May 6, 2018  
Acts 10:44-48, 1 John 5:1-6, John 15:9-17

In the name of God who loves us first.  
I'd like to preface my comments with today's collect:

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

I envy those who can stand up and proclaim without hesitation "I love Jesus."

In last week's sermon Chris really focused on the Love of God from the First Letter of John. He even used many of the talking points I intended to use this week! At one point, I thought I had looked at the wrong week's hymns when I typed the bulletin. But no, they were the right hymns and the right readings. Oh, well. Change of approach! Whereas Chris was a bit more expository on Love, today I will be more confessional on Love.

So, I repeat: I envy those who can stand up and proclaim without hesitation "I love Jesus."

I'm not quite sure what it is I am supposed to feel when I say "I love Jesus" or "I love God." I know what I feel when I say I love my wife, Jen, or my family. But these are people I can see, I can touch, I can have arguments with, I can laugh with. But Jesus, God?-not so clear to me. I can't see them and I can't touch them. (However, I have had a personal encounter or two with the Holy Spirit so that's a little clearer.) I can really empathize with Thomas who doubted. "Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet come to believe."

How is it supposed to feel? What is it I am supposed to feel? I think it can be scary to be close to Jesus, to love and follow Him. I mean He isn't just all warm and fuzzy. He can be stern, he can be demanding. He can make me feel really uncomfortable, he can sap my self confidence.

You've probably seen that Facebook posting which asks "Who would you most want to have dinner with?" Many answer -Why Jesus, of course! Me? . . . I don't know.

As I said, He can make me feel quite uncomfortable. Hey-in his fury, He trashed the money changer's tables, He sternly reprimanded Peter when Peter said "You mustn't wash my feet." He told Peter, flat out, "You will betray me three times before the cock crows!" No, I think I'd be a little anxious around him over dinner. I'd probably slop wine all over my shirt. What if I said something incredibly stupid? Or asked a question that exposed for all to see my lack of paying attention? Dinner with Jesus . . . might be a tough go.

However, I find some relief from my Jesus anxiety in the company of three friends and mentors: Father David Brown, Bishop Tom Ely, and Dr. John Williams. They are people who I hold in very high regard, who I respect, and who I have a great deal of affection for. I can say I love them. In many wonderful discussions with them I have uttered more than the occasional inanity or asked the silliest of questions. They've corrected me and we went on. <whew> I've even had dinner with them; they are my friends. So, Jesus, from today's Gospel, John 15:15b-"I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father." Dinner with Jesus? . . . Maybe, after all.

OK, so how am I to get past this anxiety, this uncertainty, this doubt. How to get to where I can be confident in my feelings when I say "I love Jesus?" How can I get out of my head and into my heart? How can I REALLY love Jesus and not just say "I love Jesus"? Well, for me it's work. I have to practice it!

What? Work on loving someone!?!? If you have to work on it, is it really love then? Don't you just fall in love? Doesn't it sneak up on you-like getting pierced by cupid's arrow sort of thing. Love at first sight and all that?

Well, there does seem to be more to it than just that. First, I think, at some point you do have to make the decision that you want to be open to loving Jesus. Then you start working on it. There's an axiom "Action changes thinking more than thinking changes action." What does that mean?

Let me tell you a story to explain. It's a medieval morality story.

Story abstract: Man of notorious reputation whose face is made ugly by his heart. Wants to court a virtuous woman. Friends discourage him, remind him he is ugly. He wears mask to hide ugliness, treats woman with courtesy, respect, affection. She falls in love with him. Friends say he has to show his true face to her. He takes off mask, his visage is now radiant and handsome.

Our protagonist acted by changing his outward behavior and so changed his inward self. In today's Gospel we are similarly reminded: "that you love one another as I

have loved you. . . . I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another." Action changing thinking.

But that begs the question which comes first: 1) Do you love Jesus first then you will obey his commandments or 2) Do you obey His commandments first and then you will love Him?

Perhaps the order doesn't matter so long as you get there. The story in our first reading points out that the Holy Spirit came on the Centurion and gentiles before they were baptized. In other stories the Holy Spirit came upon others after they were baptized. So in the end you get there-filled with the Spirit.

So working on loving Jesus is OK. Your heart will catch up with your head. That's my hope for myself -that I can get to the point of confidently saying I LOVE JESUS and really feel it.

Action can change thinking. You work on loving Jesus: you pray, you read, you sit quietly in His presence; you stay with it day after day, it will come and it will not be hollow. It is well worth that persistent effort.

In the musical play Fiddler on the Roof there is a song that captures my hope, my feeling of this persistent effort beautifully. It's between Tevye and Golde. Here's a portion of that interchange.

Tevye: Golde, do you love me?

Golde: I'm your wife!

Tevye: I know. But do you love me?

Golde: Do I love him? For twenty-five years, I've lived with him, fought with him, starved with him. For twenty-five years, my bed is his. If that's not love, what is?

Tevye: Then you love me?

Golde: I suppose I do.

Tevye: And I suppose I love you, too.

Amen