

Sunday of Easter B

First Reading Acts 10:25-26.34-35.44-48

As Peter reached the house Cornelius went out to meet him, knelt at his feet and prostrated himself. But Peter helped him up. "Stand up," he said "I am only a man after all!" Then Peter addressed them: "The truth I have now come to realise" he said "is that God does not have favourites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him."

While Peter was still speaking the Holy Spirit came down on all the listeners. Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter were all astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit should be poured out on the pagans too, since they could hear them speaking strange languages and proclaiming the greatness of God. Peter himself then said, "Could anyone refuse the water of Baptism to these people, now they have received the Holy Spirit just as much as we have?" He then gave orders for them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterwards they begged him to stay on for some days.

Second Reading 1 John 4:7-10

My dear people, let us love one another since love comes from God and everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Anyone who fails to love can never have known God, because God is love. God's love for us was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son so that we could have life through him; this is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away.

Gospel John 15:9-17

Jesus said to his disciples: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love.

If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete. This is my commandment: Love one another, as I have loved you.

A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I shall not call you servants any more, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father. You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last; and then the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. What I command you is to love one another."

Meditation

It often seems that the more schooling we have the less able we are to handle the ambiguity of Christian living. The logic of scientific thought encourages us to focus upon one concept at a time. The poetic language of the scriptures leads us to hold in a healthy tension concepts which, at first glance, seem mutually contradictory. God calls us to a way of life which makes demands, yet God's ways frequently seem to contravene the way we have taken. This was certainly Peter's experience. Peter thought that only those born in Israel could come to Christ, but the manifestation of the Spirit's gifts in the life of the Gentile Cornelius shattered all his comfortable notions.

Christ's resurrection shattered all notions of how God might work among us. It destroyed all barriers which might hedge in the possibilities of God's power working in human history.

Christ's victory showed forth the power of love: God's love which could draw forth from death the servant who had gone to death in obedience to love. For the makers of greeting cards love might be sentimental and soft. For Christians, love is as strong and as real as the demands made by friends who are willing to die that the other might live. That gives greater cause for the singing of alleluias than do fuzzy fantasies about some sort of love which can be reduced to pastel holy cards. Only living in that sort of love will enable us to know that death and life, obedience and freedom, vigilance and surprise are but different refractions of one true Light.