

Be Jesus' Beloved ones !

Jn. 15:9-17; Acts. 10:25-48; I Jn. 4:7-10

Homily for 6th Sunday in Easter Times, May 21, '06

By Father Jose Uppani

Last Sunday, through the parable of the vine and its branches Jesus told us how much we are related to him and how precious we are for him: we are His own branches well nourished and vitalized to bear the fruit of His labor. And in today's gospel, which is the continuation of that same discourse, he expatiates on the theme of his love further. He reveals how deeply he loves us and for that very reason how much we need to remain in His love and share it with others.

As the reporter of this episode, evangelist John, listened to these words of Our Lord by lying close to Jesus' breast at the Last Supper Table in order to penetrate into the depth and magnitude of these revelations, we who are here at the table of Jesus' love, at this table of the Eucharistic Liturgy, have to approach these words with profound gratitude and love to be able to experience the warmth of His love and the comfort of His friendship as he speaks to us today the very same words.

The very first thing Jesus said to the Apostles was how much he loves them: "*As the Father loves me, so I also love you.*". Jesus always bore a tremendous love for his disciples. The Scripture speaks of it thus: "*He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end*". But just before his Passion and their imminent desertion he wanted to let them know once again how much he loves them. ! Looking at their overflowing eyes and saddened face Jesus said: "I love you". He added, "even as the Father loves me"! That was beyond their limited power of comprehension. How the disciples become as acceptable to Jesus as Jesus was to the Father? But that was exactly what He said: "*I have loved you just as the Father has loved me*" (NJB). Yes, the disciples are dear to Him as much as he is to His Father! As the Father's love for His only Son Jesus is so infinitely great, Jesus' love for His disciples too is infinite. Its natural extension is that, **we are as much acceptable to Jesus as He is to His Father**. What an incredible comparison! What an exciting Good News! How can we forget the amazing statement: "*No longer do I call you slaves, but I have called you beloved*"! Do we really realize this Love He has for each one of us? No conquest is as lasting as the one achieved with love!

To substantiate how much is his love for them, Jesus said "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*". In these words he unequivocally told them that he was going to lay down His life for them. He made it clear that everything he was going to suffer during his Passion and Crucifixion was out of love of his disciples. Even though none of them would be present at the site, except John, he assured them that they would be in his heart during his entire Passion, and He would not abandon them. In the second reading this truth is re-echoed: "*In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins*" (I Jn. 4:10).

By saying "*Remain in my love*" He invited them to live in His love. He insisted on their being ever worthy of His love. He reminded them of their obligation in appropriating His Love offered to them freely. The only condition he put for it was to be obedient to His will, by following His example: "*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*". Here, Jesus tells us that the way to enjoy His love, the way to personalize this great gift, we need to commit ourselves to Him, we should maintain a

deep relationship with Him, we need to have a fervent desire to do God's will in everything, in imitation of Christ, whose sole wish was to do the will of the Father.

Then Jesus said : *"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete"*. The certainty that God loves us is the source of real and lasting joy. The more we experience the love of Christ the more joyful we become and even the worst sufferings and trials will not be able to take away this joy.

In his letter to the Romans Paul says: *"The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us"* (5:5). It is the Holy Spirit who pours out the Divine love into our frozen hearts. The first reading gave us a convincing instance of this truth: *"While Peter was still speaking these things, the holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word. The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were astounded that the gift of the holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles also, for they could hear them speaking in tongues and glorifying God"* (Acts. 10:44-46).

In fact, God's love revealed in Incarnation and demonstrated on the Cross, was actually fully consummated at Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Church. The Apostles and the first Christians experienced it. And it was that experience that enabled them to commit their life to Christ and to His people. That was why the same disciples who fled leaving the Master alone the very same night Jesus spoke about his love for them and celebrated it in the First Eucharistic Liturgy, turned out to be fully committed from the Pentecost onwards. Yes, once they experienced the depth of God's love as the Holy Spirit came upon them they were supernaturally strengthened to remain in the love of Jesus permanently and to love others as Jesus did. Because, with the Pentecost all of them were immersed in the ocean of God's love when the Holy Spirit fell upon them at the same Upper room with the sound of a mighty wind and gift of tongues.

Dear Brothers and sisters, if we mean to remain in Jesus' love, to become fully committed Christians, true witnesses to the gospel in the family, the church and the society, there is no other way than to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In today's gospel we heard Jesus' words: *"If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love...this is my commandment, love one another as I love you"*. Do we hear of any community in human history who loved the brethren so much as the Spirit filled first Christians did? The Scripture speaks of the after-effect of the Pentecost thus: *"Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need"* (Acts. 2:44-45). In fact, it is only when we are filled with God's love in a profound way through a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that we become liberated from our false self love and begin to obey God's commandment to love our brethren. This is clearly revealed in the Sacred Scripture: *" I will put my Spirit within you so that you will obey my laws and do whatever I command"* (Exek. 36:27).

Let us therefore be realistic in the practice of our faith. Opening our hearts to the continuous outpour of the Holy Spirit is the surest path to man's salvation - the ultimate goal of the whole mission of Jesus, planned and executed at so high a cost!

As the feast of Pentecost is fast approaching let us prepare ourselves earnestly to become truly worthy of the seven gifts and the manifold fruits and charisms of the Holy Spirit so that we can live our faith fully. Let Mary who led the prayer at the first Pentecost help us to thirst and pray for the Holy Spirit with great fervor.

