

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 6, 2018
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Reflection

Each week I go to the three elementary schools within our parish: Holy Redeemer, St. James, and St. Martin de Porres. In first term, I made a presentation to each grade about baptism. In second term, I spoke with them about the saints. I also began to visit the kindergarten classes. I play a song for them on my guitar, and invite questions. At some point, someone will ask, "Do you know any other songs?" So then I play a second song, and answer more questions. One girl this week had a profound question...I wish I could remember what it was. But then I saw a craft she made. The front is a picture giving thanks to God for something...in her case, the fish in the sea. The back is something she wants to do in gratitude his bounty. It says "tell others about Jesus that do not know about him."

This impulse is the result of God's love. It moves us to share a joy that is contagious. But it doesn't begin with us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." The love that we have comes from God. He is the source, deeper than the oceans. St. Augustine tells a story about seeing a boy at the sea shore. He filled a container with water, and then poured it into a hole that he had dug in the sand. St. Augustine asked him what he was doing, and he said, "I'm emptying the sea." From this, St. Augustine realized that God's love is like the ocean: inexhaustible.

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48
Ps 98
1 Jn 4:7-10
Jn 15:9-17

But we can separate ourselves from that love by choosing to ignore it, by spurning it, by closing our hands to it. Alternatively, we can choose to abide in his love by pondering it in our hearts, by praising him, by loving God and neighbour. And that's what Jesus tells us to do. They asked him about the greatest commandment in the law. He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:37-39)." But doing these things doesn't earn his love. They make us better able to receive it. Doing these things doesn't create his love. His love is prior; it comes first before anything that we do.

How does his love come first? We can perceive it naturally through the senses. We perceive beauty, consider its causes and realize that it was created by God. But an awareness of suffering can suggest that creation is not necessarily good. We know that it's good, but fallen; awaiting fulfillment when God creates a new heaven and a new earth. Others see creation as neutral or even malevolent. They want to separate themselves from matter, pining for the spiritual. Before he became a Christian, St. Augustine was a Manichean: they believed in a spiritual world of good and light, and a physical world of evil and dark. Later, the Albigensians thought the devil created the earth and God created the heavens.

Star Wars talks about the dark side of the force, and this has probably affected people's spirituality more than they know. We can misunderstand what we perceive, so God sent the prophets and his son to reveal the truth.

And here is a truth that Jesus revealed: "You did not choose me but I chose you." God's choice to love us came before our choice to love him, and it's a steadfast love marked by faithfulness. And his love for us cost him. Listen to the letter of John. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Another truth that Jesus revealed is what happens we accept his love. "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." God intends us to be joyful, and knows what we need in order to feel it. Apparent pleasures can mislead us. False reasons against doing his will can sadden us; they can make us think that we cannot go on. But we trust in his grace. It's always enough to bear fruit, fruit that will last, planted in seeds of joy within the hearts of those we meet. And it allows us to "tell others about Jesus that do now know about him - fruit that will last."