

HOMILY 6th SUNDAY OF EASTER – B
“Abiding and Loving – The Way to Joy”
(Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; 1 Jn 4:7-10; Jn 15:9-17)

Three chaps came upon a party and knocked at the door hoping to get in. A lady wearing a mask with a big smile on it answered the door and told them it was an AA party. They had to come dressed as an emotion to get in – hers was Joy. Disappointed, they walked around the house to the back alley. One fellow saw a used can of red paint in the garbage and got an idea. He smeared red paint on his face, knocked on the door and introduced himself as “red with rage”. Joy told him that was an emotion and he could come in. The second fellow found some green paint, smeared some on his face, introduced himself as “green with envy”, and Joy let him in. The third fellow, getting desperate, found an old worn out Teddy bear in the back alley. He tore open the bottom, pulled out the stuffing, put it over his hand, knocked on the door, and said, “Hi, I’m deep in dis-bear!”

Would you like to live a more joyful life?

Abide in God’s love, and love one another. In short, pray, care and share, and you will experience joy.

The readings today mirror the first encyclical of Pope Benedict – they zero in on the core of our faith: God is love. We are to love God back by abiding in his love, and love one another, in the power of the Spirit.

Abiding in God:

How do we abide in God’s love? The answer is prayer, both devotional and liturgical. It is said that the Church breathes with two lungs. One lung is devotional prayer, and the other is liturgical prayer, the prayer of the Church.

Devotional prayer can be private prayer or public devotions like the rosary. Most people are used to “saying prayers.” To truly abide in Jesus’ love, we should strive to deepen our prayer, and move towards a more contemplative kind prayer, listening to God’s word, being sensitive to what God wants to say to us and do within us.

An example of this is the hour of adoration that happens at St. Anne’s Church in Flin Flon every Saturday morning. About a dozen people come for a very simple time of singing, silence and prayer of adoration – a beautiful way to abide in God’s love in the Blessed Sacrament.

When I was a young scholastic preparing for priesthood, I chose Adam Exner, now the archbishop emeritus of Vancouver, to be my spiritual director. During our first session, he told me that if he was going to direct me, he would have to know me, and asked me to tell him my story. I proceeded to share with him my life story – the first time I had ever done that.

When I finished two sessions later, he told me that I needed to work on my relationship with my father, and asked me to pray with Isaiah 34:1-7 for a whole month. That passage spoke of God's love for me, through fire and desert, and ended with a statement that shocked me: "You are precious and honoured in my sight because I love you!"

How I needed to hear those words at that critical stage of my life. You see, my father was never able to say those words. He was a workaholic, and was never able to show his love for us the way we needed it – he just worked harder. I had reacted by trying to earn his love, and by extension, even God's love, an impossible task because love cannot be earned – it is a free gift.

There was a deep father hunger in my soul that Fr. Adam discerned. He connected my life with the Word of God in a way that started a healing process for me and turned my life around. He asked me to "abide in God's love" which was exactly what I needed. I even felt some of that joy that Jesus speaks about, as well as hope – a new future was dawning for me because of God's word.

At the same time, I was entering into the celebration of morning and evening prayer, as well as daily Eucharist. This experience of liturgical prayer, the prayer of the Church, also worked me over. It too was based on listening to God's Word, especially through the psalms, and on the celebration of God's loving presence, especially in communion. I was immersed in God's love, through a solid life of prayer, and joy began to grow within me.

Loving others through caring:

The second part of the gospel today is the strong commandment to love one another. There are two aspects to loving others that allude to the names of the two girlfriends that a priest can have – does anyone know them? They are Karen and Sharon! (Caring and Sharing!)

Jesus is very clear – there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for others. Loving others involves sacrifice, acts of mercy and charity, doing things for others. The late Mother Theresa of Calcutta is a prime example of someone who truly abided in God's Word, and then expressed her love in active ministry, picking up dying people off the streets of Calcutta and giving them a place where they could die with dignity.

Fr. Fullenback witnessed her handle a difficult patient who had stumped the efforts of a younger sister. Mr. Theresa simply hugged the girl for a full five minutes, then stared her straight in the eyes for another full five minutes, then she fed her without any problem. She was a professional in the ways of love.

Loving others through sharing:

Jesus adds another dimension to loving others however, when he says that he has revealed to us all that he has learned from the father. That is the element of self-disclosure, trust, fellowship. To be close to God, be closer to people. We need to grow in our ability to trust one another, share our lives with each other, be more transparent to each other, achieve intimacy with trusted others. That is a beautiful way to love another – to achieve intimacy with a trusted other, especially within a committed relationship of marriage, or just plain friendship.

God is love, relationship and family. To achieve intimate union with another human being, is to experience Jesus, and the Trinity in that intimacy. It is there that Jesus will reveal himself to us. That is one of the deepest and best ways to love another person – to establish a relationship of trust and acceptance with that person.

An example of caring and sharing in this way is Jean Vanier, son of the former governor general of Canada, who started the movement called L'Arche for the mentally challenged. L'Arche does not provide an institution, but rather a home for the handicapped where volunteers live with them as family. He has learned so much from them, and shares this wisdom from that experience: "If I am humble, open and honest enough to share my weakness with my brothers and sisters, then that frees them to be humble, open and honest with me, and together we grow."

Living in the Spirit:

To do all this, to abide in God's love, and to love one another, would be impossible without the gift of the Spirit. It is this Spirit of Jesus that was poured out upon the early Church, as Peter discovered in the first reading, that enables us to do as Jesus did – abide in the Father's love, and love unconditionally and totally.

The Eucharist that we share is first of all an abiding in God's love through Word and Sacrament. Then we are commissioned, sent out to be Bread for the World, to love the world as Jesus loved it, to give our lives for our brothers and sisters who are hungering for that experience of God's love.

So, to live a life full of joy, abide in God's love, and love one another. Pray, care and share, in the power of the Spirit, and you will experience joy.