

## Reflection for May 9 and 10, 2015

What a rich set of readings we have listened to today. So many important lessons to ponder. However, it's not hard to pick up on the key one – love. The word love is used ten times in the Second Reading and nine times in the Gospel. Very appropriate for Mother's Day week-end, don't you think.

The First Reading it seems may be meant to set the context because, without it, it might be easier to dismiss some people from the umbrella of **God's** love, and of ours.

So that we don't misunderstand, the First Reading makes it clear that God shows no partiality to anyone. He loves us all and all the same [pause] and he is available to all. And to drive the point home, the Holy Spirit descends on everyone, even the Gentiles, which in Peter's day apparently would have been a shocking thing to contemplate. We hear the words, "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." It must have been a scales falling from the eyes moment. Probably some of the believers couldn't accept it.

So when we contemplate the Second Reading and the Gospel, we have no choice but to hear the message of love in the context of everyone being included.

Jesus **himself** uses the word love in John's Gospel reading. And here we receive a direct command from Jesus, which I don't think he did very often. "This I command you: love one another".

Wow. How can we argue with that? And yet we do. Oh, we might say to ourselves "OK; message understood. I'm going to do it. I want to do what you ask of me. I will try my best."

But then we live our lives and they show us that this isn't as easy as it might sound at first in our zeal to be one of Jesus' followers. After all, we're talking about human beings here – they're not all so easy to love and we're not always so loving.

Sometimes it **is** easy to love. Of course, I love my family and my friends. That's usually a given, although sadly not always. Some people are just easy to love; they are pleasant and easy to be around. You have fun with them and interesting conversations. They accept the true you and you feel secure with them. And as a result, you are willing to do a lot for them - a form of laying down your life for your friends.

Some people are a little more challenging. We have to try harder to love them; maybe go out of our way; consciously recall Jesus' words. Some of these people may be friends, co-workers, even family members. Maybe fellow parishioners.

But then we run into some people, or we hear about them on the news, and we have to remind ourselves that God loves them too and so must we. And we shake ourselves and say “Really? How can this be?” We might even channel our inner Pharisee and say “but I'm not like him, her, them”. It is an ongoing challenge that we are presented with.

I have one of those difficult-to-love people in my life; no one any of you would know. She has an unhappy, limited life with a number of mental and physical health challenges. And she has no friends, or family members who want anything to do with her. One of the reasons being, at least from my perspective, is that she has basically alienated everyone and blames everyone else for her problems. I find myself in the situation of one day feeling extremely sorry for her and wanting to help and the next day getting totally exasperated. I confess that I really don't want to call her a friend or think of her that way as that would ask more of me than I am prepared to give if I'm being perfectly honest with myself. Right now, she is **my** ongoing challenge.

If we are looking for a concrete, modern day role model of what all inclusive love might look like, Pope Francis certainly springs to **my** mind. We probably all remember that first year of his papacy when he went to a prison to perform the Holy Thursday washing of the feet rite. Who did he include – a woman, a Muslim woman, prisoners. The shocked and sometimes critical commentary on his very deliberate choice

might bring to mind the reaction of Jesus' and Peter's followers when the Holy Spirit descended on the Gentiles.

Not only do we see in Pope Francis an example of an inclusive love but so often his face seems to radiate joy. Anyone can see that it is genuine. So many photos of him smiling and happy to see someone. Sort of how we hope people react to us; what we hope God's reaction would be when **he** sees us.

In the Gospel, Jesus says, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy might be complete." I picture Pope Francis when I hear those words.

So with all our human weakness, prejudices, selfishness, how can we possibly live up to Jesus' command to love one another. We certainly can't do it on our own. If so, the world would be a very happy place. As a wise friend said, we have to be transformed into love.

And the Gospel gives us a clue as to how this might happen. We are to **remain** in Jesus' love. What does that mean? Maybe it might mean remain, as in don't leave the embrace of his love. But isn't it so easy to forget to do this in the busyness of our lives?

We need to make time for Jesus – waiting for the bus, walking the dog, in the car during rush hour, first thing in the morning before the day starts. If we can do this, perhaps we

will be more likely to hear the Spirit voice helping us to love, and his wisdom when we are really challenged to love.

And of course we will fail sometimes because we are human. But we can be reassured that when we do fail, God still loves us - not because **we** are good but because **God** is good.