

Sixth Sunday of Easter May 17, 2009

Readings: Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; 1 John 4:7-10; John 5:9-17

If You Keep My Commandments

For those who attend daily mass, today's gospel reading should sound very familiar. This same passage was the gospel reading last Wednesday as we celebrated the feast of St. Matthias, the disciple who was selected by casting lots to replace Judas as the twelfth apostle. A shorter version of this passage was also the gospel reading on Thursday as the regular reading for the fifth week of Easter.

It is a passage that we hear often because it has an important message; it is a message about true love. How much does Jesus love us? He says that He loves us as the Father loves Him. You can't top that. How much does Jesus love us? He loves us so much that He laid down His life for us. Jesus shows us how to love and tells us to love one another in the same way. Our love for others should seek perfection.

Jesus chose us, we did not choose Him. He chose us and loves us even though we are imperfect and do not deserve such a great gift. We are called to love others because Jesus tells us to, not because we think they deserve to be loved. We do not offer our love to others as a reward, but as an obligation.

But there is one aspect of Christ's love for us that we often try to ignore. Jesus offers His love to us unconditionally, but we are still free to reject His words and commandments and turn our back on that love. Jesus says: "***If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love.***" And He says: "***You are my friends if you do what I command you.***" Jesus chooses us, but it is our decision whether or not to accept Him.

We need to remember this in a time when many are trying to water down Christianity. It is not enough to claim to believe in Jesus, and then live however we choose. We need to follow the commandments. Christ loves us and gave us His Church to guide us until He comes again. We need to follow that guidance as the Church interprets Christ's teachings for us. Jesus' love does not mean we can throw away the rules and everything will be okay. Parents love their children unconditionally, but still need to administer punishment when the children are disobedient. Jesus kept His Father's commandments and remained in His love and He expects us to try to do the same.

There is another passage in John's gospel that we heard at daily mass a couple of weeks ago. In that passage Jesus says: "***I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world.***" (John 12:47) Some take this passage out of context to contend that they will not be condemned for their behavior. But we need to take a step back and look at a larger portion of the passage:

"I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness. And if anyone hears my words and does not observe them, I do not condemn him, for I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world. Whoever rejects me and does not accept my words has something to judge him: the word that I spoke, it will condemn him on the last

day, because I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and speak.” (John 12:46-49)

Jesus does not condemn us, we condemn ourselves when we reject Him and the words that He spoke at the instruction of His Father.

When we turn our backs on the commandments and Christ’s teachings, we reject Jesus and His love. We reject His offer of friendship. He does not condemn us, it is we who condemn ourselves. When we turn our back on the commandments, we do not admit our sinfulness and do not ask for the forgiveness that restores our relationship with God. God will not condemn us for being sinners, but we condemn ourselves when we fail to recognize sin.

What commandments and teachings do you choose to ignore? Take some time later today and examine your conscience. Are their behaviors and actions that are part of your life, but that conflict with Church teachings, which you have rationalized as being acceptable? Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you and give you strength. Do not turn your back on Christ’s love. Do not condemn yourself by failing to listen to His words, the words He received from His Father.

Deacon Joe Hulway