

Acts 10:44-end

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, 'Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptised with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' So he ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

John 15:9-17

'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: love each other.

Reflection

There can be few passages in the Bible as challenging as this one. Jesus tells us in verse 12, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." We are called to love, radical love. The key as to how we are to do this comes in the first verse of the passage, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." In last week's gospel Jesus spoke of himself as the true vine and said similarly, "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit" (v5). In each case the word used for remain is the same, and it conveys a sense of staying, or

abiding, the kind of peace, stability and security that we associate with being at home. The two then are inextricably linked. If our lives are rooted in Jesus who is the true vine, then they are at the same time rooted in the love that exists between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To remain in Jesus' love, then, suggests being immersed in Jesus' love—surrounded by Jesus' love—comforted by Jesus' love—empowered by Jesus' love. One of the images that comes to mind is of a set of Russian dolls that are on my desk, with a series of dolls all inside each other. We are like that smallest doll, immersed inside the love of Jesus who is himself immersed in the love of God. And this love is not the warm, fuzzy, emotional love that people speak so easily of these days. People speak of loving Line of Duty, of loving churros dipped in chocolate, of loving being immersed in a good book, or a walk along a sandy beach. Love in this sense is so much more than a psychological state; it is something we do, not an emotion. The love of which Jesus speaks is more than a feeling—it is love in action—love that pays the price. “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends” (v13).

We are commanded in this passage to love one another like this. Now I'm not suggesting for a minute that we are all called to suffer physical death for others, but we are called to give up our lives in the sense of setting aside our beliefs and our prejudices about others, our self-absorption, and to show some humility in order to serve those among whom we live. Love is the mark of a disciple; love that reaches out in compassion, care, listening, and service.

And this brings us to the first reading we heard this morning. Loving one another has implications for how we treat the people we meet every day, how we think of other groups whose differences can lead us to prejudice. In the Acts reading it is clear the Gentiles were those who, until this point, were excluded by those first Jewish followers of Jesus. Who is it that we, even subconsciously exclude? Travellers, refugees, asylum-seekers, the homeless, addicts? Love is the atmosphere we live in as followers of Jesus, and love is powerful! Love does not mean that we have to like one another or to always agree with each other. But love calls us to desire the best for the other person and to care deeply for them, despite any differences or difficulties we may experience.

The Father loves the Son, and the Father and the Son love us, and invite us to inhabit that love and to share it with all. The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who anoints us to share that love with each other and with the marginalised. It is the most powerful witness we can give this world. “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35)

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