

6th Sunday of Easter
Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48;
I John 4:7-10;
John 15:9-17
Little Flower - 5/10/15

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I want to wish all mothers a very happy Mother's Day, and we also want to welcome all of our visitors and all who have returned home to Little Flower to celebrate Mother's Day.

As you may remember, in last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus said, "*I am the vine, you are the branches,*" and "*Remain in me, as I remain in you.*" The image of the vine and the branches suggests that Christian communities should be communities of intimacy. In an article entitled "The Experience of Friendship," William A. Sadler, Jr., suggested that today's Gospel identifies the five basic elements of true friendship.¹ I would argue that these five are also the basic qualities of a community of intimacy.

Jesus said, "*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.*" Joy is the first quality of a community of intimacy. In a 2013 homily, Pope Francis reminded his listeners that joy is a gift from God.² When Christian communities are communities of intimacy, Christians find joy in being with the members of their community whether at Sunday Liturgy, at parish gatherings, or in shared ministries. As Jesus himself said, "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" [Mt. 18:20].

The second quality is communion, i.e., union with God and unity with one another, rooted in baptism and the Eucharist. As St. Paul wrote, "*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, ... and we were all given to drink of one Spirit*" [1 Cor. 12:13]. Concerning the Eucharist, he wrote, "*Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf*" [1 Cor.10:17].

The third quality of a community of intimacy is freedom. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*" [2 Cor. 3:17b]. In a community of intimacy, everyone is treated with respect, and everyone is free to become the best version of himself or herself. In fact, Christians call forth the best in each other.

The fourth quality is truth. To use the words of Pope Francis, a Christian should feel free to speak the truth he or she believes boldly and without fear but should also listen to others humbly and with an open heart.³ At the same time, St. Paul challenged the Ephesians to speak or live the truth in love [Eph. 4:15]. In a community of intimacy, we act as each other's conscience.

The fifth quality is sacrifice: "*This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.*" If Jesus' love for us was self-sacrificing, our love for one another must be self-revealing, self-giving, and self-sacrificing.

Today's first reading suggests a sixth quality: inclusiveness. One of the biggest controversies in the early Church concerned the acceptance of Gentiles into the Christian community. Even St. Peter had to be convinced that it was a good thing. In today's reading from Acts, Peter told Cornelius and his household, "*In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.*" We are called to be an inclusive, welcoming community.

My brothers and sisters, in today's reading from John's First Letter, we are told that love is of God. Just as parishes are communities of intimacy, families are communities of intimacy because both families and parishes have their origin in God's love. May we never forget the love our mothers brought to our families and the faith they shared with us. In the words of an old Irish blessing, "May [we] never forget what is worth remembering, or remember what is best forgotten."

¹William A. Sadler, Jr., "The Experience of Friendship," *Humanitas*, Vol 6(2), 1970, 177-209.

²"Pope Francis: 'Christian joy is a gift from Jesus'" *Vatican Insider*, 05/10, 2013, <http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/the-vatican/detail/articolo/francesco-francis-francisco-24715/>.

³Greeting of Pope Francis to the Synod Fathers During the First General Congregation of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Monday 6 October, 2014, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141006_padri-sinodali.html