

6th Sunday of Easter
Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48;
I John 4:7-10;
John 15:9-17
Little Flower - 5/5/24

My Brothers and Sisters,

Two of our greatest personal needs are to love and to be loved. Today's readings offer us profound insights into the meaning of love.

Today's reading from the First Letter of St. John talks about the relationship of love to God. St. John tells us that love is of God. In other words, all true love has its origin in God. When we talk about the love of God, we are not talking primarily about our love for God but God's love for us revealed in Jesus Christ. Likewise, our love for others comes from God. The word *eucharist* means thanksgiving. When we celebrate Eucharist, we thank God for all of his gifts, but above all for the gift of Jesus Christ who makes all love possible.

Over the course of my life, I have read several books and articles that have profoundly influenced my life. One of those is an article I discovered my senior year of college entitled "The Experience of Friendship" by William A. Sadler, Jr.¹ William Sadler found five elements or qualities of friendship in today's Gospel. If Jesus' relationships are the model or paradigm for our relationships, I would suggest that these are the five elements or qualities of any love relationship and the distinguishing qualities of any real community. Today I would like to share my reflections on these qualities.

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 love or friendship. When our relationships are authentic, we enjoy being with our families, our friends, or our community. Even when we are separated from them, we find joy in thinking about them and our relationship with them.

The second quality is communion. The word *communion* means *union with*. When people love each other as family or friends or community, they share in each other's lives. They share each other's joys and sorrows. To establish, maintain, and develop communion requires the capacity and willingness to be self-revealing, to listen, and to genuinely care.

The third quality is freedom. Authentic relationships are born in freedom. Love cannot be forced. Likewise, at the basis of love or friendship is respect. When we respect others, we cherish their otherness. We allow them to be the persons they are, the persons God wants them to be. We understand that they are not extensions of us. Likewise, authentic love or friendship calls forth the best in them. Love or friendship motivates them and even empowers them to become the-best-version-of-themselves.

The fourth quality is truth. With those we know and love and who know and love us, we are free to be ourselves. At the same time, we are free to speak the truth to each other, always remembering St. Paul's challenge to the Ephesians to speak the truth in love [Eph. 4:15]. People who love and care about each other become each other's second conscience. Again, people who love each other call forth the best in each other.

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.*" Just as Jesus' love for us was self-sacrificing, our love for one another must be self-revealing, self-giving, and self-sacrificing. One might argue that the best measure of our love for another person or persons is our willingness to sacrifice for them. The more we love, the more willing we are to sacrifice.

My brothers and sisters, authentic love is also inclusive and expansive. One of the biggest controversies in the early Church concerned the acceptance of Gentiles into the Christian community. In today's reading from Acts, Peter told Cornelius and his household, "*In truth, I see that God shows no partiality.*" The salvation Jesus came to bring was for all people. When love turns in on itself, when it becomes exclusive and restrictive, it withers and dies.

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