



Acts 10:25-26, 34-35,
44-48

Psalms 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

1 John 4:7-10

John 15:9-17



REFLECTION

Sometimes it is easy to think that faith is something that is all our own doing. It is our belief that got us here. It is our struggle that has made us strong. We can easily pat ourselves on the back for our hard work.

In today's Gospel, Jesus reminds us that this is not the case. He made the first move. He chose us, called us, and formed us so that we could respond in faith. We are here because he loved us first, even when we seemed unlovable. He saw us for who we truly were and loved us all the same. That is the overwhelming love of God. Not only does he love us, but he calls us a friend. He keeps no secrets and tells no lies. He deals with us honestly and with compassion. He has proven over and over again that he is trustworthy and faithful.

Because he loved us first, he gives us a command: to love one another, just like he loves us. Loving is simple, right? Yes and no. The love that Jesus gives is radical (think of all his interactions with the poor and the marginalized throughout his ministry). We will spend our lives learning to live this love. But the first step is to love Jesus back, as best we can, and love what he loves.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How can you be a better friend to Jesus?
- ❖ What are the challenges to loving those who seem unlovable?

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 5, 2024

ACTION

Love is a powerful and humbling act of faith. Have you ever heard the saying, "It is better to love than to be right?" This week, approach any conflicts with this in mind. Ask yourself, what is the most loving action I could take in this moment? Challenge yourself to not seek being right so that you can win the argument, but to be the most loving person you can be in that situation. Let love be your guide. Reflect on how it felt to deal with conflict in this way.



"You've Got a Friend in Me"—Randy Newman (from *Toy Story*) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hG-2tQtdIE>



May 5, 2024

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LECTIONARY #56B

Acts 10:25–26, 34–35, 44–48

Psalm 98:1, 2–3, 3–4

1 John 4:7–10

John 15:9–17

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

Today's Gospel mentions the word *love* nine times! What does it mean to love? St. Thomas Aquinas said that to love means to will the good of another. God wills our good. The ultimate good is eternal life with him. Jesus says that to remain in his love and achieve this ultimate good, we must keep his commandments. God's commandments are not hinderances to our happiness but provide the path to eternal life. Jesus also calls us to love one another as he has loved us. He laid down his life for us and shows what true love entails—sacrifice, selflessness, and service—all intended for the good of the other. Jesus calls us his friends because our relationship with him is grounded on love.

Q FOCUS: *Remain in the love of Jesus and share that love with others.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

We remember and celebrate St. Damien of Moloka'i on May 10. He was born in Belgium in 1840 and later joined the religious life around age twenty. Damien was granted permission to go on a mission to Hawaii. About two months after his arrival, in 1864, Damien was ordained to the priesthood and began his pastoral ministry. At that time leprosy, which is now known as Hansen's disease, was spreading and the government intervened by sending all infected people to a leper colony on the island of Moloka'i. Those who had been exiled there

needed their spiritual and physical needs tended to. Fr. Damien volunteered to remain there permanently to care for these people. His ministry was a great help to the inhabitants of the island, and he also worked to bring greater awareness to their plight and get the support of the government for supplies. He eventually contracted the disease and died from its complications. He is the patron saint of people with leprosy.

Church Teaching Connection

"[I]t is important to realize that Christ's love is not a superficial feeling, no; it is a fundamental attitude of the heart which is manifested in living as he wishes. . . . Love is fulfilled in everyday life, in attitudes, in deeds. Otherwise, it is only something illusory. They are words, words, words: that is not love. Love is concrete, every day. Jesus asks us to follow his commandments, which are summarized in the following: 'that you love one another as I have loved you'" (Pope Francis, Homily, May 6, 2018).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 15:9–17

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Jesus said to his disciples: "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as

I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy might be complete. 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. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Today's Gospel speaks a lot about love. We may use that word every day but maybe we haven't spent much time reflecting on its meaning.

► In what ways do people use the word *love* today?

► Do you think this is the same as what Jesus means when he is talking about love? How would you define the kind of love Jesus is speaking of?

There are different aspects of the love Jesus is talking about today. First, we hear that Jesus loves us as the Father loves him. This is divine love, love that surpasses all our understanding. Later in the reading Jesus instructs us that we are to love each other as he loves us. He loves us with a divine love. He loves us with a love that lays down its life for another. He commands us to love each other in this way.

► Does this sound challenging? Does it sound like something we can achieve on our own?

► In practical terms, what might it look like to "lay down your life" (sacrifice things) for your friends and family, for those you love?

Love involves sacrifice. We might not be called to literally die for someone or to save someone else's life, but we are all called to put the needs of others before our own wants. For example, we might sacrifice hanging out with friends on a Saturday morning to spend time with an elderly relative. Maybe we give up our lunch so that our friend who does not have lunch money can eat. In these small ways, we are giving up part of ourselves (our wants and desires) for the good of others.

Another aspect of the love Jesus talks about in today's Gospel is that we remain in God's love by keeping his commandments.

► What are his commandments? Can anyone recall the Ten Commandments? How do these commandments keep us in God's love?

Keeping the commandments we just discussed is an act of obedience. It takes effort and we must choose to act in that way. We may experience moments when we don't want to love with the love of Jesus. The love of Christ led him to the cross. He was obedient to the Father *because* he loved the Father and he loved us. He chose to do what was commanded so that God's divine love could be poured out for the salvation of the world. Jesus' love led to obedience. Jesus' obedience led him to the cross. The cross leads to eternal life. Eternal life leads to happiness. Here we see how obedience and sacrifice complement one another in Jesus' example of love. This kind of love is more than just a feeling; it is a way of life and essential to our faith. It leads us to our eternal happiness: life in heaven with God.

A final reflection on love has to do with Jesus' bold statement that he, the Son of God, calls us friends. This elevates the value of friendship to something that is not only good but that is holy. Cultivating good friendships helps us tremendously in our spiritual walk with God. When we have supportive friends in faith, we are better able to remain in Christ's love and follow his commands.

► In what ways do you consider Jesus your friend?

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 184.

We remain in God's love by keeping his commandments.

Loving others means making sacrifices for their good.

Jesus chose you and calls you his friend.

Act on the Word

Holy Friendship

For this activity, you will need copies of the quotes below, as well as any additional quotes you find, Bibles, pens, and paper or journals.

Before beginning the activity, do an online search for quotes about friendship from the saints. Compile a list of three to five quotes (including the ones listed here). Make copies of the quotes to give to the young people.

- ✱ "God sends us friends to be our firm support in the whirlpool of struggle. In the company of friends we will find strength to attain our sublime ideal."—St. Maximilian Kolbe
- ✱ "Fly from bad companions as from the bite of a poisonous snake. If you keep good companions, I can assure you that you will one day rejoice with the blessed in heaven; whereas if you keep with those who are bad, you will become bad yourself, and you will be in danger of losing your soul."
—St. John Bosco
- ✱ "A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love."—St. Basil

When you are ready to begin the activity, pass out all the materials. Then share with the teens that today's activity will help them reflect on the gift of friendship. In today's Gospel, Jesus calls us his friends. It is important to reflect on how our friendships are or are not leading us closer to Christ. The Book of Sirach, an Old Testament book that is filled with wise and moral teachings, also instructs us on friendship. Have everyone open their Bibles to Sirach 6:5–17 and follow along as you read the passage aloud. Then briefly discuss with the teens what stood out the most to them.

After everyone has shared, have the teens spread out in your gathering space with their materials and invite them to spend some time in prayer while journaling about the meaning of friendship by re-reading the Bible passage from Sirach and reading the saint quotes.

Closing Prayer

God, you are love itself.

Overturn sin and death

by the power of your love.

Transform the whole of creation

*so that all people may welcome your
friendship forever.*

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.