

6th Sunday of Easter (A)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
May 20, 21, 2017

One of the unique features of today's Gospel is that Jesus speaks for the first time of the disciple's love for him. The Gospel of today began with the words, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* It is probably not a surprise that it has taken some time for Jesus to address this: most of us don't talk about personal love in the first couple of conversations we have with someone. But, if a relationship is to ever become significant, it will eventually be open to conversation about love.

All these weeks of the Easter Season, we have heard different understandings of Jesus, different ways that he sees himself in relationship to us: I am the Resurrection and the Life, I am the Bread of Life, I am the Vine, I am the Good Shepherd, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, etc. But Jesus feels that it is time for him to address the most important piece of the relationship: love. Do the disciples love him? *"I am going to send you an Advocate, the Spirit of Truth..."* Do you love me? *"I will not leave you orphans."* Do you love me? *"My Father will love you."* Do you love me?

Early upon his coming here to Dubuque, I remember Archbishop Jackels talking about his lack of a relationship with Jesus. He stated how his family always went to Mass, and that he and all his siblings went to religious education. He said his parents saw to it that they all 'got their Sacraments'. But it wasn't until later in college that he actually developed a personal relationship with Jesus.

Another example about having a relationship with Jesus, and nicely related to a weekend when we are electing new parish leadership, is one given by author Sherry Weddell. She writes about successful parish communities, and the role of the Holy Spirit in these communities. Once when working with the leaders of a particular parish, trying to have them recognize the place of God in what they were doing in the parish, Sherry asked them to think how they were helping God's Kingdom to be realized. After a bit of time on this, one of the parish leaders attending said "I don't have a relationship with God." Sherry was stunned; this woman is a leader in the parish, she thought. Then Sherry, herself a convert to Catholicism, realized yes, this could be true! She then remembered how common it is for Catholics to be well 'churched', having 'got all their Sacraments', but yet not having a personal relationship with Jesus, or in any case being unable to express this relationship to others, or even to themselves. Like Archbishop Jackels in his earlier years, "got all the Sacraments, but 'didn't have a relationship with Jesus'.

Everything we are hearing in the Easter Scriptures these past weeks is all about having such a relationship with Jesus, with the risen Jesus to be specific. I believe in Jesus, I

know about Jesus, but do I have a relationship with him?

All the miracle events of the early Church, all the teachings about Bread of Life, Vine and Branches, Resurrection and Life, taking Jesus up on his offer of being a 'chosen race, a part of his Mystical Body ... all of these depend on and flow out of the fact that these people had or were developing a personal relationship with Jesus. The apostles and early disciples would not have been able to preach, cure, or endure the sufferings they did if they had not had a personal relationship with Jesus.

That is what we must strive for with Jesus. That is why we extend the Easter Feast for 50 days. We need to hear these stories. We need to be inspired by them and commit to Jesus as the early disciples did. Only a personal relationship with Jesus will lead us to real commitment to Jesus, to being as Sherry Weddell would say, "Intentional Disciples". But it takes more than just that the Easter Season is 50 days. It takes what I spoke about with the Catholic school students during one of their Easter Season school Masses. We are really strong on our knowledge about God the Father, and also about His Son, Jesus. It is easy to know and even connect with Jesus. He lived among us for 33 years. But most of us are less familiar and less connected to God the Holy Spirit. And it is the Holy Spirit who was the energy and wisdom behind both Jesus and His Father. The Holy Spirit can be the same for us. How appropriate to reflect on this today when each of our Scriptures include teachings about the Holy Spirit.

Acts – *“Peter and John went down and prayed for the Samaritans, who had just accepted Jesus, would receive the Holy Spirit. They laid hands on them, and they did receive the Holy Spirit.”*

I Peter – Peter says that Jesus who was *“put to death in the flesh, was brought to life in the Spirit”*

John – *“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth.”*

We have 3 weeks prior to Pentecost. We have young people preparing for Confirmation. We have a change in priests in the very near future. We have new families joining the parish. This is a great time to reach out to and depend on the Holy Spirit. Let us not take this lightly the Father and the Son are only two-thirds of the God who loves us. Give some credence to the Holy Spirit. The time is now! The opportunity is now!

Come Advocate of Jesus fill our hearts.

Come Advocate of Jesus teach us to rely on Jesus.

Come Advocate of Jesus create us in relationship with you, Jesus, and God our
Father.