

THE EMMAUS SERIES

6th Sunday of Easter, Year B

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

1 John 4:7-10

John 15:9-17

Harvesting our Easter blessings

As we look forward to celebrating the Lord's Ascension and Pentecost's coming of his promised Spirit, our Easter season is drawing to a close. The mood of today's liturgy is reflective, inviting us to take in more fully the deep implications of our Easter faith.

Standing out in today's readings is the theme of love. What more important theme is there for our restless human hearts? Yet it is so often trivialised and distorted in today's popular culture. From our earliest years we have learned to know what genuine love is, not from lessons in words, but by being loved ourselves. Today's readings invite us to recognise that the Paschal Mystery that is the centre of our Easter celebration is an expression of God's love for us, and an invitation to enter into the love of Jesus and his Father, and to give it expression in our own lives. True love expresses itself in action rather than in words. The Father's love, John's letter tells us, was expressed in our midst when he 'sent into the world his only Son, so that we could have life in him'. The words of Jesus in John's gospel remind us how complete is the gift which he brings, as an expression of the love which he shares with the Father: 'A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friend'.

Genuine love is an unselfish gift. It seeks the good of the beloved rather than its own benefit. God's love is an outreach of utter generosity; it comes before any response on our part, as John's letter points out. (As the continuation of our passage puts it 'God loved us first'.) And our response can give nothing to God except the joy in the heart of the selfless giver. As we contemplate the mystery of God's generosity, we are reminded that, in the end, love is the most precious of all gifts. If it is true that true joy is the finding of what our hearts are made for, then a love that is genuine brings a joy which is without compare: 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you ... I have told you this that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete'. The fruit of genuine love is the intimacy of friendship – sharing all that matters in one's life with the beloved: 'You are my friends ... I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father'.

Coming to a deeper appreciation of the love the Father and the Son have for us, expressed in the Paschal Mystery, we will find new enthusiasm and energy for the outreach which must express our life in Christ during the coming week: 'You did not choose me, no I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit' (We are reading the continuation of the passage about 'the true vine').

In the first reading continues the story of the early Church. As Peter baptises Cornelius, the first gentile convert, we are reminded of our theme: God's generous love is for all, 'God does not have favourites' anybody 'who fears God (i.e. has a loving reverence before God) and does what is right is acceptable to him'. Like Cornelius, we too have, through our baptismal sharing in the Paschal Mystery, been given to share in the mystery of the love of the Father and the Son.

John Thornhill sm