

**The Ultimate Challenge**     Sixth Sunday of Easter/B     May 6, 2018     10:00 AM  
Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48;     **1 Jn 4:7-10;**     **Jn 15:9-17**     (Jesus is telling his disciples that his whole life is given to them as a gift and an example that they are to imitate and copy.)

**“You must love one another as I have loved you.”**

We are still, in this reading, at the Last Supper, in the long bittersweet farewell that Jesus gives to his chosen friends. Now this format of this long farewell of course is the evangelist’s idea and way he has of talking about **the most important ideas Jesus conveyed**. And he puts them all right there **after the washing of the feet, and it’s all about the nature of love**. On the one hand, Jesus is joyful in that he is now able to return to the Father; but on the other hand, he is fearful and anxious because he knows that he is going to die, because his return to the Father is through the cross.

**Jesus is telling his disciples that his whole life is given to them as a gift and an example that they are to imitate and copy**. As St. Paul said in Philippians: “Son though he was, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to grasp, but surrendered it taking the form of a slave.” Now this role of slave he has just demonstrated by **the washing of the feet**. **All Jesus’ life is a pouring out of himself, his life, his love, his energy, everything**. And now he becomes not the master of his disciples, but **their fellow slave, and thus their friend**. So he lowers himself to raise them, and that’s the whole motion of redemption. God’s love comes into the earth to raise up all people into friendship. **God offers equality to the creation by serving at the lowest level**.

Now this peculiar kind of love is called *agape*, **which means unqualified love, unconditioned love, unasked for love, and often unwanted love**. But as the epistle made it clear, God loves because it’s his nature. God’s nature is to love. You could say, quite correctly, that God cannot not love. That’s grammatically clumsy, but it’s true. **God cannot not love**. So

love is what has created us. **Love is the basis and foundation and ground of all creation**, and it is in every creature, and **especially in the human being made in the image and the likeness of God**, although there are **many who willfully choose to ignore it**. And yet in spite of this fact, this truth, this revelation, the world suffers for lack of awareness of what's going on, of what God is doing, of what and who we are, of the truth that really makes us free. And so **we suffer in darkness and ignorance**.

Jesus having spent his whole life opening this window into reality, now **sends forth his disciples to continue his work**, which they can now because he has loved them and befriended them; and now **they can love and befriend the world**. Moreover, the work that continues is not a work of worshiping God or even really loving God. **It's a work of loving one another**; that's the commandment. **"Love one another"; that is the commandment, and there is no other commandment. It involves extending friendship to the whole world.**

Now in all awareness, in all honesty, we have to say **this is a very daunting assignment**, and no doubt the disciples were partially baffled and partially overwhelmed by what they were hearing. And in addition to that, in the next paragraph, which we didn't read today, Jesus admits that the world hates him and the world will hate them, which means you, if you carry out this assignment. **If you continue this work, the world may very well hate you**, at least what is called the world, the willful people who don't want God—they will hate you. The unconditional love God offers to a willful and self-centered world is **set on a collision course, and that collision is the cross**. But the cross shows how intrepid and unrelenting real love is in a way that nothing else ever has. So Jesus is inviting, but he is also warning. **Following him involves the greatest possible joy, but also the greatest possible danger. It is the ultimate challenge.**