



SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

CYCLE A

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

I Peter 3:15-18

John 14:15-21

GATHERING

(Some fresh flowers and an unlit candle rest on a table in the gathering place.)

Love's requirements are the focus of this week's gospel, along with Jesus' assurance that God's presence empowers our being faithful in love. Last week we reflected on our call to be "living stones." What did you do this past week to build up *the house of God*? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The leader invites members to some time of quiet attention to God's presence. The candle is lit. After some minutes, the community prays as follows.)

All: Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Leader: Shout joyfully to God, all the earth,
sing praise to the glory of his name;
proclaim his glorious praise,
Say to God, "How tremendous are your deeds!"

All: Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Leader: "Let all on earth worship and sing praise to you,
sing praise to your name!"
Come and see the works of God,
his tremendous deeds among the children of Adam.

All: Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Leader: He has changed the sea into dry land;
through the river they passed on foot;
therefore let us rejoice in him.
He rules by his might forever.

All: Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Leader: Hear now, all you who fear God, while I declare
what he has done for me.
Blessed be God who refused me not
my prayer or his kindness!

All: Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Psalm 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20

(The community dwells in quiet while an selection of instrumental music is played.)

Focus Question

Name a time when what love required of you was a real challenge.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel reading, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

The relationship between love of Jesus and keeping his commandments frames this week's gospel. Obedience here is not founded on obligation. It is presented as flowing from love's gratitude. And yet, as spouses, parents and children, we know that love's demands can be a challenge.

Keeping Jesus' commandments is possible because we do not have to do it alone. At the heart of Jesus' message here is the assurance of the divine presence. Hints of the divine mystery of relationship that the church would only more fully understand centuries later spill over from this gospel. We hear of the Advocate who will *be with us* always, of Jesus *being in the Father*, of our *being in him*, of his *being in us*.

Our God is a communion. This is the mystery from which we spring, out of which we live and toward which we journey. We are never alone. It is in being in touch with God's enduring presence in our hearts, in our lives and in our world that we are able to live love's obedience. This is the reason for our hope.

Bad things, we know, sometimes happen to good people, sometimes even to good people when they are doing good things. When we "suffer for doing good", we need all the more to be in touch with our reason for hope, the Christ who has suffered with us, the Christ whose Spirit the Father sends as an enduring presence in our lives.

We see in this week's scriptures that God's Spirit is mediated by the laying on of human hands. We are called to speak of God's presence by word and deed. "We are God's hands now," the church prays. The touch of spouses, parents, children and friends opens us to the mystery of God at work in our being. The sacramental touch initiates, seals, nourishes, reconciles, blesses, empowers and heals in God's name.

Sadly, human touch can sometimes wound or betray or kill. But when it does, our reason for hope is still secure. Jesus' promise remains: "I will come to you." God's touch will make all things new. Even when others do not, we keep his commandments because God's presence is alive in our hearts, in our lives, in our church and in our world. God's presence is the center of our being.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ What does keeping Jesus' commandments mean to you?
- ◆ When has doing good brought you suffering? How did you deal with that?
- ◆ What has touch meant in your life?
- ◆ To whom do you bring a healing touch?
- ◆ If someone were to ask you to put into words your reason for hope, what would you say?
- ◆ When was your love so strong that it overcame your reluctance to do what needed to be done?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Bring God's healing touch to a wounded planet. Learn the facts about global warming and what you can do about it. Go to www.fightglobalwarming.com. Support what the church is doing about global climate change at www.catholicsandclimatechange.org.
- ◆ Participate in a walk to help others, such as the Walk for Juvenile Diabetes (walk.jdrf.org), the walk in support of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.NAMI.org) or a walk with the American Heart Association (www.heart.org). Invite others, perhaps your whole small community to join you.
- ◆ Take steps to bring reconciliation to a wounded relationship in your life. Begin with prayer; then take some personal initiative to move toward healing with the other.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites members to offer prayers of praise, thanksgiving and petition. To each prayer, the community responds, "Blessed be you, O God." When these prayers are complete, members stand in a circle and join hands. The leader prays as follows.)

Leader: Good and gracious God, Father, Son and Spirit, you are the center of our being. We come from you; we live in you; we strive toward you. Touch our heart anew with the sense of your saving presence. Empower us to bring your healing touch to our world. Praise, honor and glory be yours O God, you who reign forever and ever.

All: Amen.

(Members join in singing or listening to, "You are the Center." The song may be found on the Internet. Members exchange of a sign of peace.)

