

THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER - B

On this Sunday the gospel reading presents us with part of Jesus' last discourse with his disciples before his death. He gives them a new commandment: 'love one another as I have loved you.' Jesus has set before his disciples and before us a new, a higher standard, they and we must love 'as I have loved you.' Love for everyone is to be the distinguishing mark of the new faith, begun by Jesus' great act of love for us by dying on the Cross. In the first lesson Peter comes to realise that this love of Christ embraces all peoples and in the second reading we are helped to understand the full implications of Christ's love for us.

The **First Reading** is from Acts of the Apostles. This New Testament book is part two of a history of the rise of Christianity, the first part being the gospel according to Luke. They became separated when, about 150 A.D., Christians wanted the four gospel accounts bound together in one volume. The author, Luke, is a Syrian from Antioch, a doctor of non-Jewish origin, who was a close friend of Paul accompanying him on his second and third missionary journeys. Luke collected a great deal of evidence from a variety of sources which he edited. The book deals with the primitive Jerusalem community under Peter's leadership, the spread of Christianity to Samaria, to the gentile peoples and the early days of Christianity in Antioch. From chapter 13 Luke deals with Paul's three missionary journeys and ends with Paul a prisoner in Rome.

The reading, 10.25-26,34-35,44-48, tell of Peter's mission beyond Jerusalem, he cured Aeneas in Lydda (in Judaea) which brought many into the Church and at Jaffa Peter restored Tabitha to life and again many came to believe in the Lord. Peter stayed on in Jaffa where he had a vision. He was struggling to understand the meaning of the vision when some men arrived at the door asking Peter to go with them to the Roman centurion Cornelius. The next day Peter arrived at the centurion's house and this is where our reading begins. They greet Peter as if he was some superior being, and he then begins to address Cornelius and his household. Peter has come to realize the meaning of his vision, that the Jewish people are not the only ones to be saved. God has no favourites people of any nationality if they fear God and act rightly are acceptable to him. Peter's thoughts and words are confirmed when the Holy Spirit descends on Cornelius and his household and Peter knows now that these gentile people cannot be refused baptism. After our reading Peter has to explain his actions to the brethren back in Jerusalem. The Church is growing and not just geographically. (If you have time read from Acts 10.1 to appreciate the background to the reading.)

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 97.1-4, along with the response, is indeed a response to this reading. We can sing a new song to the Lord for he has worked new wonders, as the second verse says God 'has shown his justice to the nations.' As the reading has shown the salvation of God is for all peoples of the earth, this is repeated in the last verse of the psalm, so it is right we 'burst into shouts of joy.' The psalm itself is celebrating the coming of the Lord to judge the earth at the end of time, with Christ's Resurrection we have entered that end time and await his coming.

The **Second Reading** is taken from the first letter of St John. There are three letters attributed to John the first being the most important, possibly written at the same time as the gospel. This letter was written to the Christian communities of Asia (Turkey) because they were suffering near disintegration due to some early heresies which were afflicting the Church. In the introduction the writer says he wants to share what he has 'seen and heard', his experiences, with his readers. He picks out three main points 1. To live in the light of Christ and he lists four conditions to live such a life. 2. To live as God's children with three conditions necessary, and 3. He speaks of the source of love and faith. Love is from God so we must love, and faith in Christ Jesus is necessary to overcome the world. The letter ends with two supplementary points.

The reading, 4.7-10, comes from the section where the writer speaks of the source of love and faith and this will occupy him to the end of the letter, apart from the two supplements. Within this section of the letter we will be reading about the source of love. We are encouraged to love each other because the source of love is God, 'love is from God', and if we love we can be certain we are children of God. The writer then takes us through the opposite scenario. If we fail to love we cannot know God because God is love. Then we are shown that the central theme in our salvation is God's love for the world, shown by the way God sent his only Son into the world, this makes God's love visible and makes those who believe participate in love. The command to love as Christ has loved us, spoken of in the gospel reading, is here given fuller explanation: 'It is not we who loved God, but God loved us and sent his Son to expiate our sins.'