

Sixth Sunday Easter – B, May 17, 2009

Church of Saint Ann, Lawrenceville, NJ

Our gospel reading today comes from the great priestly prayer of Jesus at the last supper, on the night before he died. In John's account of the Last supper we have no account of Jesus taking bread and blessing it and doing the same with the wine. John omits the institution narrative and gives us the powerful account of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. John also gives us this rich prayer of Jesus for us that is packed with meaning.

It speaks of: being Chosen, being Gods friend, being sent, being joyful. Now for a word or two on each.

Today we heard something very startling. Jesus says you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.

If you remember way back in Advent, we spoke about Biblical election. That for some unknown reason, God chose a group of people, Israel to be the agent of salvation for all, then within Israel he chose certain people, Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Mary all protested because of their unworthiness, but God ignores their protests, God chose them anyway to be part of God's great salvation story.- Gods great plan for us.

Today Jesus tells us that God has chosen us. That's you and me. We have not chosen God, but God has chosen us.

Just think about what that means.

We like to think we work hard at our plan for salvation, we work hard on our spiritual life, on pleasing God, on trying to do what Jesus wants, climb our own spiritual mountain, trying to conform our life to the Gospel, trying to become holy. All of that is good and helpful, but in the end it is not any of our efforts that do the trick. It is God who for some strange reason chooses us.

We are chosen to be God's friend. Nothing can be better than that. Imagine getting a phone call from Pope Benedict, or President Obama, or our favorite movie star or sports figure asking us to be their friend. There is nothing we can do that is better than that. We know how important and how wonderful friendship is because of what our relationship with our friend's means to us.

What does it mean to be a friend? It means to open yourself in love. That is what friendship is all about opening yourself to another. God first loves us and we in turn open ourselves in love to God which is another way of saying that we love all that is a part of God. We love one another.

We don't earn God's friendship. It is a gift. Freely given.

God chooses us, searches us out. All we need to do is to allow ourselves to be chosen by God. To open ourselves to God.

We become part of God's great story. We know that whenever God chooses someone. He chooses them for a mission. He chooses them to do something. Go and bear fruit. Look throughout Bible, every time God chooses someone, they are sent to do something. Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Mary. That mission is to play a part in God's great dream, God's great drama. We have made the cuts, be chosen for the cast, we have made the team. What an exciting adventure, to be a part of this great Theo Drama.

And although we may not be real clear yet on the part we have been chosen to play, we know for sure that it has something to do with love. Any mission from God has to do with love.- God is love.

That comes through so strongly throughout the scripture and most especially in this high priestly prayer of Jesus that we read today.

As the father has loved me so I love you

Remain in my love.

This is my commandment love one another as I have loved you.

Jesus loves us totally, unconditionally. To the extent of laying down his life for us.

Friends this is not rocket science- it's simple, straightforward, crystal clear. God has chosen you and me and given us a mission and that mission is to love. Look at the Saints, they all differ so much- Thomas Aquinas, the scholar, Isidore the farmer, Mother Cabrini great missionary, John Newman, immigrant bishop of Philadelphia, Teresa the little flower, Juan Diego the peasant, Ignatius, the founder, they all differ so much, but the mission that united them is there love. How we love may not be perfectly clear yet. We may need to work that out a bit, but we know the direction in which we are to move. We know the standard by which we must judge all our deeds- is this the more loving thing. Is this adding to the love in our life and in our world? This is the measuring stick we use as we go about discovering the specifics of our mission.

The other measuring stick of how we are doing in our mission that comes through so strongly, yet is often so neglected is joy. Friends sometimes we miss this extremely important sign of God's

love. Sometimes we think that being a Christian means bearing the cross, suffering great hardship, great deprivation, carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders and making sure that everyone knows it by the faces we make, the complaints we utter, the tales of woe we spin so readily.

It is clear that one of the strongest signs of God's love and God's presence and God's kingdom is joy.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy might be complete.

We are chosen by God to be God's friend; we are given a mission to love and told that that love will express itself in joy. If we are not joyful people, then we haven't gotten our mission right yet.

Joy is one of those things that we Christians are not too good at. Somehow we think that we are called, not only to bear one another's burdens, but to let everyone know that and how hard it is. If there is no joy then something is wrong. Our mission is not of God. Now joy is not that soupy, glad handed stuff. Joy is a deep down realization that we have God as our friend and that we don't need much more, that we don't need to earn God's love; we don't have to exhaust ourselves in working for it. All we need to do is open ourselves and surrender to God's love. A clear sign of that love is joy.

Last week at daily Mass I said perhaps the Vatican needs a curial department of joy—you know in our church we have a bunch of departments to make sure the Church is on track. The Commission for - defense of the faith, departments to make sure we are doing liturgy correctly, that priests and religious are living up to their charism, that universities are teaching the right things, but we have no curial department for joy—to make sure that bishops and priests, religious and lay people are increasing happiness and joy in our world. What a great move for the Pope to establish a Curial Department for Joy in the world. Imagine, The Pontifical Commission on Joy and Happiness in the Church.

Now loving is not always easy. Ask any parent, anyone who is sick or suffering, anyone who has lost someone, anyone dealing with broken relationships. But we are called to be joyful in the midst of our suffering, our hurting, and our longing. We can be joyful because we playing a part not in our own story, but in the great Theo drama, the great story of God.

God has chosen us, God has loved us, God has sent us on a mission to love one another and a clear sign that we are doing what we are sent to do is our joy. It is pretty simple, pretty basic.

We better all get working on this during the week. We don't want the Pontifical commission on Joy and Happiness to give us a sneak visit and say we can no longer be called Catholic because we aren't spreading around enough joy and happiness.