

Psalm 98 (PSALM 98: 1, 2-3, 3-4) - "All the ends of the Earth have seen the power of God"

I love this psalm and I love singing it. It is a call for celebration! A call to "Celebrate Victory"

VICTORY FOR ALL THE WRONGED AND OPPRESSED

This is not the celebration of a single victory for one special group, but an all encompassing victory. A victory for ALL the wronged and oppressed and as mentioned in the commentary, it is not a "mere settlement".

In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles (ACTS 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48), we hear of a gathering. In that gathering, those present receive the Holy Spirit, which is manifested by those present beginning to speak in tongues.

ALL present receive the Holy Spirit!

This is significant because unlike the Pentecost event (which we haven't yet celebrated in our liturgical calendar and which was centered around a specific group of friends), this one was a very mixed gathering of baptized Christians and of gentiles.

Here we learn: "Every nation whoever fears God and acts uprightly is acceptable"

It's actually an eye opening event because here it is made known that this gift of the Spirit is not just for some "special" group, but for all open to receiving it. In kind, those present who had not yet been baptized, are baptized in water and received a part of the body of Christ even if they were previously a Gentile.

ALL ARE WELCOME

In our second reading from the First Epistle of John (1 JOHN 4: 7-10) and our reading from the Gospel of John (14:23, 15: 9-17), we now get new marching orders:

The Epistle verses we heard today are actually a continuation on a theme which begins in prior verses. Not mentioned in today's reading is the theme of **REMAIN or DWELL**.

Remain in Christ – dwell with Christ

And today, we hear,

Love one another as I have loved you.

We are called to “Remain in Christ and follow this new commandment to love one another as Christ has loved us.”

LOVE

And yet again, this is love not focused on some exclusive group. We are called to Love not just some people but all people because God's love knows no end. There is no partiality – it is an open invitation.

Follow this commandment and go forth and bear fruit. Spread the word, spread the love. Help the Spirit open the hearts of others that they may do so in kind.

It is also notable that all this is happening when receiving the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Divine Presence, the settling / dwelling of God within us. This part of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit – from the Hebrew, the Shekhinah, is the feminine aspect of the Divine; A powerful internal loving driving force.

**The Spirit drives us to love one another,
as we have been shown and given love.**

In reflecting on this theme of God's Love and thinking in today's term of love one another, it made me contemplate the **charge** we have been given.

This brought back to a moment so long ago . . .
Picture it! Palmer Massachusetts, August 1992.

I was a mere seminary candidate in the process of completing the re-entry process for seminary Studies for the Diocese of Springfield MA. The process was not exactly going smoothly. That evening I had been asked to organize the music and be the cantor for mass for the “End of Summer” Springfield seminarian gathering.

Then Bishop John Marshall (my “would be” future boss) opened the gathering with mass. As we sat for his homily, I tried to be attentive, but from it, I basically remember two lines:

Love is not a warm and fuzzy feeling. It is hard and arduous.

Arduous - “Requiring strenuous effort, difficult and tiring”

At that point in the homily, I began to reflect on everything leading up to this moment in the mass:

- I had already gone through this application entry process before and was accepted.
- I had been to the seminary for a sentence of 12 mo 6 days and some odd number of hours in 1989 to 1990.
- I had gone through the exit process with express intent that I needed time to figure some things out but wanted to return.
- After 12 months, I decided I wanted to return.

This gathering was the culmination of that journey, and during this process I didn’t feel much love. It had been hard and arduous, and now I hear “Love is NOT a warm and fuzzy feeling”??

I can remember that when I heard this, something in my mind went “CLICK”. I said to myself, “I am in so much trouble this is not going to go well”

At the time, to me Love was everything. It was the core of my faith. You needed to be a loving person, a giving person. It was so “matter of fact” in my mind. I was “young” and naïve.

For some reason as I typed my notes and began to reflect on the readings for today.

LIGHT BULB!

This commandment IS TOUGH.

I never looked deeply at what it means to “Love one another”
I am supposed to Love my neighbor as myself. Love my neighbor as Christ loves me. Well gee folks, I might not even “kind of like” all my neighbors.

We all go through our daily routine and meet our daily challenges. We tackle large projects and movements in working for justice. In all this, we are faced with different forces working with and against the many aspects of the lives we are trying to live well.

For myself: Meaningful challenges and changes that come to mind, some of which I have shared with those present here this evening are:

- Going to the Seminary – Round 1 – heck applying to the seminary.
- Leaving the Seminary.
- Reapplying for Seminary, and instead attending Dignity/Hartford for the first time.
- Joining and becoming a part of Dignity USA and in turn Dignity New England.
- Marching with Dignity USA in the March on Washington, 1993.
- Traveling to see the AIDS quilt and joining in the candle light march on the mall in DC, 1997.
- Protesting the silencing of Sr. Jeanine Gramick in front of the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Hartford CT.
- Protesting in front of Cathedral High School in Springfield MA where the clergy was in conference on the priest abuse issue and where “Homosexuals” were focused on as the scapegoat.
- CT PRIDE board member 2001-2002 and dealing with challenges and conflicts within the Connecticut GLBTQI community.

None of this was easy or lacking in tension or apprehension but through it all, was I thinking about loving the people on the other side of issues?

This charge to “Love one another as I have loved you” is a charge for me, for us, to love the people on BOTH sides of the equation.

In all we do each day, it is important to put into context the true meaning of this commandment of Love. It can be TOUGH to be mindful of it and to put it into play.

Love and pray for:

- Myself
- My Family and Friends
- AND
- The people on “the other side” of my challenges

Maybe they aren’t doing the same for me, but it is my responsibility to do it for them.

Pray for them, as we pray for ourselves, our families and friends, and ask for the the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Shekhinah, to visit and dwell with them and bring to them God’s love.

**BECAUSE THAT TRUE LOVE OF GOD,
IS A LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE!**

Be a disciple – bear fruit – Spread God’s Love.

We are faced each day with personal and community adversaries and today it seems more “In our faces” than ever, but we need to remember as difficult as the task may be, we can take this on and we can bear fruit. We can persevere, In God’s Love!

Amen