

Sixth Sunday of Easter – May 10, 2015

Love comes in many flavors. Goodreads.com lists 39,169 quotations about love. So where did we learn what the word “love” means? Who taught us? How has our understanding of what “love” is changed over the years?

With all the portrayals of love we may have seen in movies or on TV, read in books and heard in song lyrics, we Christians will always and everywhere turn to Jesus Himself. Hear again what he says: “I want my joy to be in you and your joy to be complete. So love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. And this is what I command you: love one another.”

Perhaps the best way to love is this: to put your life on the line for your friends. This is what Jesus did. For us mere mortals, we could imitate that love in this way. “Life” for us is spending money, possessions, comfort, free time, reputation, coolness ratings. Can we put these on the line for others? Standing up for someone being bullied or reviled or gossiped about is probably a good acid test. Doing so when the bullies and the revilers and the gossip-mongers are one’s own friends is positively heroic.

Still, it helps to notice some models around us who show us how to love in imitation of Jesus. I’m talking about friends of Jesus who move effortlessly in the Father’s love. In Pope Francis we have one such model. He not only writes about the joy of the Gospel, he lives it. He moves joyfully and easily into an embrace with young and old, rich and poor, able-bodied and disabled, people of different backgrounds, lifestyles, and religious persuasions. For Pope Francis, all are included in the orbit of God’s love, with a special place for those on the margins.

It’s a safe bet that more people will be open to accepting the good news of God’s love and living their lives by it if they experience a disciple who brings God’s love to all, without restriction. That disciple may be Pope Francis – or you or me.