

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – May 10th 2015

**NO ONE HAS A GREATER LOVE THAN THIS, TO LAY DOWN ONE'S LIFE FOR ONE'S FRIENDS –
Biblical commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

Jn 15, 9-17

Jesus said to his disciples: "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy might be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love 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. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another."

The distinctive sign of a believer or a Christian is a full and overflowing joy, as to be instilled into others.

Jesus, in this passage of Gospel, tells us why.

The evangelist writes: *"As the Father loves me"*. God loved his Son Jesus, by conveying His spirit on him, that is his same loving ability. *"So I also love you"*, the spirit, the loving power, ability or energy that Jesus received from the Father, is given to all those who welcome him. *"Remain in my love"*; Jesus revealed his love in chapt. 13 by washing his disciples' feet. Service is the only assurance of remaining in the love of the Lord. Lord's love is real and believable when is turned into service behaviors for others. Love then is not just a feeling, but a concrete way of living that makes others' life better and sligher.

And here Jesus states *"If you keep my commandments"*. He just gave one *"Love each other as I have loved you"*. Practical and concrete actions of this commandment, every time it will become true through new ways of acting, of service, of sharing, of cooperating, this will be equivalent to the concept of *"commandments"*.

Here comes the announcement made by Jesus *"I have told you this"*, what did he tell? We are at the half of chapt 15; during the first half Jesus said the Father is like a vine grower. Which is his interest? That vine bears always greater fruit. It's him who will take care of this, who will look after, treat, protect and take away all harmful elements that prevent branch from bearing more fruit. So *"I have told you this"*, which are things that Jesus told? He said not to worry about anything; the only worry of a believer, a branch, is bearing much fruit and loving always more. He shall not take care of his life – and it's a wonderful and favorable exchange for the believer – because it will be the Father to take care of it directly. There's an exhortation here made by Jesus as to always live realizing there's the of the Father's voice in our ears continuously whispering *"Don't worry, just trust me"*.

This is the source of joy; *"I've told you this so that my joy"* – it is the same joy of Jesus and Jesus is God, so it's a divine joy – *"may be in you and your joy might be complete"*. The main characteristic of a believer is joy, but a joy of such a kind as not to depend on how life is going or how much others love us; it just derives from this inner experience. **The Father takes care of me because I've chosen to take care of others.**

So the source of joy is making the experience of feeling deeply loved.

Then Jesus repeats *"This is my commandment"*. He highlights this is HIS commandment in order to set it against those of Moses. The practice in Jesus communities is the only commandment, the one of love; in fact he says once again *"love one another as I love you"*.

He then adds: *"No one has a greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends"*. He doesn't just mean a final gesture, the supreme one, giving the physical life to another, but an entire existence completely devoted to others' welfare.

Now Jesus – and this is the first time in Gospels – states that disciples are his friends: *"You are my friends"*. Moses, who was God's servant, built a relationship with God as the one between a master and his slaves, based on obedience; Jesus, the Son of God, suggests another kind of relationship, the one between a Father and his sons, no more masters and no slaves. Jesus is suggesting a relationship between a Father and his sons based on resemblance. Well, this kind of relationship leads to a friendship with Jesus.

He emphatically says *"I no longer call you slaves"* – the translation quotes *"I no longer call you slaves"*, but truth to tell, he never called his disciples 'slaves', the Greek text is very emphatic: No, I never called you slaves!!!!

The relationship between Jesus and his disciples is not the one between a master and his slaves, but a friendship one. And at the end of this passage *"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit"*. 'Bearing fruit' is subject to the action of 'going'. It's not something like staying, being motionless, simply waiting for others to come to us, but 'going'. Where? Following Jesus; he is the visible temple of God's love who comes towards those who felt excluded from God. All those who feel excluded or refused by religion, those are the true mission of a believer.

Those are the places in which we bear much fruit. By doing so Jesus guarantees that “*whatever you ask the Father in my name*” – which doesn’t mean using special wording like “through Christ Our Lord”, but identifying with him and being like him – we can be certain the Father will give us.

This is the true source of joy.