

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Theme: God's Unlimited and Embracing Love for all Humanity

By John Paul Arowosoge, MSP (For DebarAdonai.org)

Today's readings emphasize the limitlessness of God's love to all and the invitation for us to partake and share this boundless love with others. In the Gospel, Jesus says to His disciples, "It was not you who chose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will last." The fruit he refers to is Love – *Agape*. The Greek word *Agape* has the sense of affectionate regard or benevolence towards someone, an unconditional love that does not segregate, unlike *philos*, which is having a good feeling towards someone (friendship) or *eros* which is love solely for pleasure. He, therefore, commands us to "love one another as I loved you." The act of bearing fruit that will last is expressed in the action of loving one another as Christ loved us.

Jesus gave us an example of such love, the kind of love the Father and the Son have shared with the world. The Father, out of love for us, "gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The Son also said, "No one has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus did lay down his life for us, sharing the most extraordinary form of love with us – *Agape* and commands us to go forth and do the same to others.

In the second reading, the author reiterates and reminds the community of Jesus's command to love. He said, "Beloved, let us love one another because love is from God." Love is, therefore, the birthmark and quality of those who come from God. He, however, also said, "whoever does not love, does not know God, for God is love." This is indeed a good point for reflection. Whenever we refuse to love, we prove ourselves not to be from God by denying ourselves of being His children. The author then replays the example of God's revelation of love to the world by sending Jesus into the world. Furthermore, he said, "not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins." God loves us even when we least merit or deserve it. Love is the way to God, the truth about God and the life in God, and we are invited to share and spread this love to others.

In the first reading, the apostle Peter faced a practical experience of the love of God to the first Gentile convert to Christianity – Cornelius, a Roman Centurion. Although Cornelius was described as a God-fearing and prayerful man who was charitable to the Jewish people (Acts 10:1-2), he would have been seen as undeserving in the eyes of some Jewish converts of God's love unless he became a Jew. For this, Peter experienced in a trance, the Lord's voice asking him to rise, kill and eat of the different kinds of animals, reptiles and birds on a large sheet before him. Three times he said, "No Lord, I have never eaten anything impure or unclean", and the voice said, "what God has cleansed, you must not call unclean" (Acts 10:9-16). In Cornelius' house, he began to understand the message and said, "**you are aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. However, God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.**" Therefore, "**I now understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation (Jewish or Gentile), anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.**" This would later influence Peter's argument and decision in favour of the Gentiles at the Council of Jerusalem, in Acts 15:1-35.

When Peter preached about the resurrected Christ to Cornelius's household, to the amazement of the circumcised believers (that is, the Jewish converts who accompanied Peter), the Holy Spirit, as on Pentecost, fell upon them, they received the gifts of the Spirit and began to speak in tongues. The Jews did not expect the unbaptized Gentiles to receive the Spirit, hence their surprise. With Cornelius' conversion story, the walls of separation, the thrones of privilege and the scales of self-centeredness were torn down. God's love is unlimited and all-embracing for all humanity. With this realization, Peter ordered their baptism, saying, **“can anyone stop these people who have received the Holy Spirit like us from being baptized?”**

No one, therefore, can control the Spirit of God, for “the spirit blows wherever it wills.” When we preach the good news of Christ, the Spirit decides how it works, and the gift of faith is bestowed on the believers as He wills. This should be a cause of joy for us since it reveals the immense Love of God to everyone in the world. Therefore, we are invited to break barriers, destroy boundaries and reach out to others by spreading love across the borders of our comfort zones. God's love is boundless and eternal, and he wants us to remain in him and express this love that He has shared with us to others.