

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 5-6, 2018, Cycle B

We are told by the Acts of the Apostles that Peter and the “circumcised believers who had accompanied ‘him’ were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles.” In other words, Peter and his companions were shocked that those they considered not holy – non observers of Torah – would be able to receive the Holy Spirit. Their very notions of what constitutes holy were being shattered before their very eyes. Early Christians had to learn to redefine what being holy meant in the light of how Jesus lived his life and what Jesus thought.

The First Letter of John presents us with that redefinition of holiness: “Beloved let us love one another, because love is of God.” First John goes so far as to say: “Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. God is the definition of holiness, if one does not Love, one is not holy, for love is the definition of holiness.”

In the gospel passage of John, Jesus defines his divine love for us! Jesus says, “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.” And God considers us his friends; in Jesus, God laid down his life for us, and we are to love as Jesus loves. We are to lay down our lives in service to each other. Loving as Jesus loves – sacrificing ourselves for the sake of others – is the sole criterion that determines our holiness. Being the broken, wounded, sinful human beings we are, we say impossible; hopeless! It would be easier to observe the 613 precepts of the Mosaic Law. Really!

Granted, living the kind of sacrificed love Jesus calls us to is not easy, and depending alone on our own resources we will fail miserably. We need to take to heart the lesson of last Sunday’s Gospel passage, where Jesus calls himself the vine and we the branches, and tells us: “...without me you can do nothing.” But, if we the branches remain attached to Jesus the vine, we will be nourished with the grace necessary to bear much fruit for the Kingdom of God. We heard Jesus say last weekend: “Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit...” Remaining in Jesus through an active prayer life, by regular reading of and reflecting on the scriptures, and consistent celebration of the Eucharist, we will be filled with the Spirit and thus empowered to pour out our lives in loving service becoming true signs of the Father still working in the world, as the Father worked in the world through Jesus.