

**Reflection on the Gospel-6th Sunday of Easter Year B
(John 15:9-17)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

The constitutions of my religious institute remind me that “the tender mercy of our God has given us one another”. The implications of this profoundly beautiful truth are spelt out thus: “In our communities, we try to live in the friendship of Christ’s disciples [Jn 15:15]. To so live calls forth relationships of equality, a real acceptance of ourselves and others, a forgetfulness of anything that does not make love its message.” Living in the friendship of Christ’s disciples is at the heart of a gospel way of living. It is the commission at the heart of today’s reading and seems to be exactly what Pope Francis wants to say to all believers in his new Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exultate* (Rejoice and be Glad).

As we listen to the proclamation of the gospel, we might attend to the repetition of “joy”, the three-fold repetition of “friends” and the nine-fold repetition of “love”. We might attend to the way in which the pronouns I/my/me and you/your function in the passage. We may also notice the reference to “commands” and “commandments”.

We tend not to associate “commands” with friendship and love because those we count as our friends are not usually in the habit of commanding or ordering us to do what they want. We derive little joy from being told what to do. And yet, there is no resiling from the juxtaposition of these terms. God, imaged in the gospel passage as “Father”, loves Jesus. Jesus remains or abides in God’s love so deeply that this love flows on to his friends. They are to love one another as Jesus has loved them. This is his commandment or commission to them, and by extension to us. It directs them/us to live for each other and put their lives/our lives on the line for one another. It means being faithful to the teaching of Jesus as he has been faithful to God’s commandments.

Remaining in the love of God or of Jesus and doing what God or Jesus commands seem to be one and the same thing. In other words, love is not just an emotion: it is always expressed in action that is in tune with and for the sake of the other. The disciples need no further explanation. Jesus’ whole life and his courage in the face of impending death have shown them what it means to love one another.

Living in the friendship of Christ’s disciples is not some abstract goal. Too often we affirm the goodness of our selfless companions on the journey only when we come to lay them to rest. As we approach the end of the Easter season, we might give thanks for the love of our friends, for their witness to holiness and for the joy that they bring to our lives.