

Sixth Sunday of Easter – May 6, 2018

Acts of the Apostles 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48 1 John 4:7-19
John 15: 9-17

Stunned. I cannot think of a better way to describe it. Peter was stunned. This was his reaction to what he had experienced in the home of Cornelius. He had come to the household of Cornelius who was a foreigner, a non-Jew, an officer in the occupying army of Rome. It would seem to be the last place that he could expect to see what took place. Those who were present heard what he had to say. More importantly, they listened to him and they responded.



In one way it was not all that unusual. After all, Jesus had spoken with non-Jews. There was the Samaritan woman at the well, the Syro-Phoenician woman who sought help for her daughter, and the Roman centurion whose servant was ill.

It was not just the fact that these persons had listened to Peter and had responded to him. What he also observed was that the Spirit of God affected them and transformed them. He was

stunned by what he saw as God's action at that moment. What was his reaction? He declared his realization that "God shows no partiality." It did not matter who or what these persons were. And thus Peter asked: "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing them?" In other words, could anyone interfere with confirming how God was reaching out to these persons.

Peter was stunned because it came home to him in no uncertain terms what it truly meant to follow and to embody Christ's command to love as God loves us.

God shows no partiality. There are no artificial barriers to the love of God. There are no limiting definitions as to who was or who was not to be loved. If God shows no partiality, then we, too, are not to show partiality.

In the perspective of Peter, in all that he had known and experienced beforehand, before he had encountered Jesus and all that entailed – all this was stripped away by the faith of those who had listened to and responded to his words. Even more so, it was affected by the very evident action of the Spirit that had been experienced. To baptize these persons was simply the recognition of the effect, the power, the action of God present in these moments.

If God so clearly shows no partiality, and we profess faith in God who is love, how are we to reflect this in our lives? How do we carry out Christ's express command to love? This is not just some rhetorical question to be heard and ignored. It is a specific challenge made to each one of us. It is challenging because it requires the elimination of all preconceptions, all

pre-judgments, all barriers and limitations that we may construct.

To love is a reflection of the very nature of God. It is not just some warm and fuzzy feeling. To love is an active way of being. It involves our minds and our wills. It requires actions more than just words. To love is to honor, to respect, to acknowledge the dignity and value of others as creatures of God. To love is to raise the importance and worth of others above that of ourselves. Is not this the way to understand the words of Jesus in his willingness to lay down his life for another? To love one another is difficult at times – there is no question about that. It does not require a feeling for or a liking of another. But it does require a genuine selflessness and sacrifice on our part in our thinking and our acting toward others.

Perhaps, like Peter, we must be stunned into a reaction. We must be stunned to recognize that this love commanded by Christ is to be present actively in our lives. We must be stunned to know and to realize what is required of us to reveal God who is love, to reveal our truly good and gracious God.