



Reflection on the Scriptures of the Day
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Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter

In today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, representatives of the Apostles were sent with a letter to Antioch because of distortions and misinterpretations of the rules and teachings of the early Christian community. It is apparent that the first rules were not well received or understood. In life we all experience concern when we are presented new or revised rules. We question who made up the rules and why they are necessary. Most people do not balk at understandable rules. By the end of the reading it is evident that those in Antioch are happy to live by the new rules proposed in the letter. The truth is, we don't always get to question the rules and get re-consideration of what they should be in any aspect of our lives. However, it is through dialogue that we gain a deeper understanding and are able to explore the implications of rules in our lives including those related to our church.

The Gospel is a challenge as it highlights the core commandment of our faith, the commandment given by Jesus to: "love one another as I love you." It may be easy many days to show that love to those in our families (although sometimes that too can be a challenge!). The question is if we can we ever show that kind of unconditional love to every other person we meet?

Both readings convey the reality and challenge of truly loving one another and seeing beyond one's self and the frailties of others. We must continuously strive to reach out to others -- all others -- not just those we like or love. It is seeing the face of Jesus in the persons we interact with everyday or once in a lifetime. It is seeing through an entirely different lens rather than our own narrow perspective. It also emphasizes the spirit of sacrifice that underlies Christian love, the importance of seeking commonalities and letting go of dividing beliefs and practices, which are not central to our faith. This can be quite painful at times, however, just as the unity of the early Church was saved and

allowed to expand and prosper, it can also inspire us today when we struggle with differences among us.

What it means to us in our daily life is that we look at each other as a dear brother or sister, to be loved and cared for. It further means that we suffer our human sufferings for the sake of the work of Christ, not with complaint and anger, but with patience and gentle compassion. It also means that our lives are marked by an astonishing joy – even amid suffering and loss.

My prayer today is that our hearts and minds will be open to the real meaning of what Jesus is asking of us...to be Christ-like... to respectfully listen and respond to the voices and needs of one another through our gifts, talents and presence in our world today.

In their time with Jesus, the disciples had witnessed Jesus' way of being with and for others. They heard and witnessed the truth of his words and actions. They experienced the life through Jesus' presence with them.

I think that Jesus was trying to tell his friends that it was because of their relationship with him that they could trust in him, in his ways, in his truth, in his life. However, to truly understand the meaning of his words, the disciples and us today have only to open our hearts and minds to who and what Jesus was. We have also the other words of Jesus to Thomas: "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." ... and that by believing we have life in Jesus name.