

6th Sunday in Easter
ACTS 8:5-8, 14-17 and JN 14:15-21
Thom Trunzo

As we move through this Easter Season, albeit it has been a very odd one with the Pandemic sequester orders in place and we have been doing most everything in our lives differently, we must continue to be aware that we are primarily on a spiritual journey back home to the Eternal Banquet. And while we continue to be distracted by virus news and regions re-opening and world-wide counts of cases and associated deaths and political finger-pointing, we must find a way to detach from all of that and remain steadfast on growing our relationship with our God and deepening our baptismal commitments of serving, leading and protecting as Christ did.

Today's readings point us to the upcoming feast of Pentecost. In the reading from Acts, we find the first sketch of what will become the "Sacraments of Initiation." As we review the events of ancient Samaria where Philip had traveled to proclaim the good news of the resurrected Jesus, we find that through his words and deeds in serving the people, many came to believe and wanted to be part of this great spiritual movement and change. So he baptized them and then sent for Peter who was actively preaching in Jerusalem. It is reported that when Peter arrived, he *laid hands on them* and that they received the Holy Spirit. When these two actions were completed, baptism by water and the laying on of hands, then the newly baptized were invited to the "Breaking of the Bread." The "Laying on of Hands" developed into our sacrament of Confirmation, and the "Breaking of the Bread" became the sacrament of the Eucharist. From the earliest days, these three actions, which became sacraments, were intimately connected and, for hundreds of years, kept in this order. Even today in the Eastern Church, the sacraments are kept in this order and done at the same time, so that there are only "fully initiated" members.

John's writings are always complex and generally have deeper meanings hidden beneath the words themselves. Drawing on Greek philosophy, he uses the "If" and "Then" logic. *If you love me, then you will keep my commandments.* That seems simple enough, but two questions arise. The first question is, "What does KEEP mean?"

A better translation of the original Greek for the word "Keep" would be FULFILL, in other words, "If you love me, then fulfill my commandments; that is, make my commandments come to life!

The second question is, "What are the commandments of which John speaks?" He does not say "Keep the 10 Commandments" but merely "MY commandments."

This passage is part of John's Last Supper Discourses. In these, Jesus gives us 3 commandments, and these commandments are those of which he refers:

1. *If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you (13:14-15).*
2. *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just like I have loved you (13:34)* The love that John uses is the Greek *work AGAPE*, that is, Unconditional Love. It refers to a divine type of love.
3. *Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me (14:1).*

Today's Gospel then challenges us to examine both our external actions as well as our hidden spiritual intentions. When we serve others by *washing their feet*, we are immersed in humility and compassion. There is never a thought or desire for repayment or even recognition. We serve, meet people where they are in whatever place they are in whatever pain they are experiencing. Keeping this first commandment calls us to be the visible experience of Jesus, speaking with his words, touching with his hands kneeling as his body is bent over in humble service.

Living out the second command entails loving in an unconditional manner. It is forgiving once and then never recalling that sin again. It demands that we accept people where they are and love them, extend concern and compassion for them even if they do not love us back or even if they perhaps dislike us totally. It demands that we remove ourselves from being judgmental, categorizing people by their appearance, economic status, their beliefs, their political persuasion, their looks or ethnicities. Agape love is deep, profound and touches the realm of the divine. It is something to which we can always strive, but will most likely we will never completely master, because only God is love.

Finally, the third commandment is the only one that does not include action or a way of being. It is a statement of faith! BELIEVE in God – BELIEVE in me! Faith is hardest when there is unimaginable pain or the appearance of injustice. “Why would God allow so much suffering to go on for so many people?” “How could God allow such a young person or infant to die?” “It’s not fair that people be killed by their own government just because of their socio-economic situation or political affiliation.” “How can a loving God stand by and watch so much hate and wars and allow millions of people to be refugees when the leaders remain safe and comfortable?” The list is almost endless, but it is always much easier to “believe” when things are great, but in the pits of despair, Jesus’ command remains – *Believe in God – Believe in me!*

It is the work of the Spirit, received in Baptism and promised to the church through the apostles and disciples that allow us to carry on and carry out these three commands. We have not only our God to rely on, but we should never forget that we journey as a community. We have each other to care for us and help us, as we are there to care for them and help them along the way. God puts the right people in our paths, and sends us to them so that we can walk with them. For each we are to be givers of hope, service and healing, as others are sent to be the same for us.