

MAY 6, 2018



SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER



ACTS 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

PSALM 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

1 JOHN 4:7-10

JOHN 15:9-17

REFLECTION

In the First Reading, many are amazed that the Holy Spirit descended upon Gentiles as well as Jews. This reflects a major argument of the early Church Fathers: whether or not believers had to become Jewish and be circumcised before they could become Christians. Peter felt that becoming Jewish was necessary to be a follower of Christ, while Paul argued for a more inclusive approach. This reading reflects the point at which Peter has finally changed his mind. Peter says, "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34). This makes me think about our lives today and how we can be tempted to exclude others. I remember being in high school and wanting to be one of the "popular kids." I eventually was accepted as a "popular kid," but there was a problem: my classmate Phil also started to be accepted by the group. I sensed a rivalry between me and Phil, as if we knew that only one of us could get into the "cool crowd." So whenever I invited people to a movie night or a party, I excluded Phil. To be fair, Phil also acted the same way toward me. Looking back, I recognize now that the reason I tried to exclude Phil was that I thought I could build myself up by putting him down. After months of trying to keep each other out of the group, Phil and I eventually became good friends (in fact, Phil became one of my best friends through high school and college). It seems to me that we often want to draw the lines, to decide who is "in" and "out." We want to do this because we feel special when we feel like we belong, especially when others don't belong. But that exclusivity might cause us to miss out on incredible friendships—something I risked by trying to keep Phil out of our group. I had no idea back then how good of a friend he would be to me.

ACTION

There is a common saying: "There are no strangers here; only friends you haven't yet met." How often do we think like this? Think of someone in your school or youth group or club who is sometimes excluded. Do you participate in the process of excluding him or her? Do you ever try to reach out to that person? As a challenge, the next time you see that person or someone else being excluded, try to imagine that person as a "friend you haven't yet met" and challenge yourself to reach out to that person. Through this, we can begin to keep Jesus' commandment to love our neighbor.

JOURNALING QUESTIONS

● How often do you feel excluded? How often do you try to exclude others? Who is one person in your life that you could reach out to as a "friend you haven't yet met," and what is keeping you from doing so?