

God Doesn't Play Favourites

Acts 10: 25-26, 34-35, 44-48; Ps. 98; 1 Jn. 4: 7-10; Jn. 15: 9-17

Many people like to be in the 'In' crowd. Remember in high school? The people in the 'In' crowd were the coolest, the best looking, the best dressed and, therefore, the most popular. Many people want to be part of a group and there is nothing particularly wrong with that. There is safety and security in numbers. But membership in a group often means being included while others are excluded.

Many of Jesus' followers felt that they were in a select group who had been with Jesus during His public ministry, witnessed His miracles, and listened to His teachings. They may have felt entitled to call themselves followers of Christ. Imagine their dismay when Cornelius and his entire household declared themselves to be believers. By their zeal, it was clear that they had received the Holy Spirit.

How could this happen? Cornelius was not a Jew. He was a Gentile. And worse yet, he was a Roman centurion; part of the occupying army in Caesarea Philippi, the people that had crucified Jesus. Surely, he should not be included in the group of Jesus' followers!

But Peter, having received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, answered the crowd by saying: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him.' He knew that God does not play favourites. He knew that anyone who has been moved by the Holy Spirit to believe in Christ and follow His commandments to love God and neighbour should be baptized.

Peter stated that there was no exclusivity to being in the group of Jesus' followers. Peter was echoing Jesus' teaching: 'You are my friends if you do what I command you'. Jesus also taught: 'If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love.'

The apostle John, in his letter, puts it simply: 'everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.' If we follow Jesus' commandment to love, we will abide in Him and, through Him, abide in the Father.

These Scripture passages bring us comfort; that all of us can become friends of Jesus by following His commandments. But there is an unsettling portion of the Gospel. Jesus says: 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.'

Jesus laid down His life for us, His friends, but could we do the same? Most of us would have second thoughts at the prospect of dying for someone else even for a loved one or close friend. Fortunately for most us, this will not be necessary. But laying down our lives for our friends could mean putting their needs ahead of ours even if it means discomfort to us. This can be difficult for those of us who have been taught from an early age to put 'me first' and to remember to 'look out for Number One'.

We need to remember that we did not choose Jesus but He chose us to follow His commandment to love and to 'bear fruit, fruit that will last'. This is the mission that He has entrusted to each one of us who call ourselves Christians. By putting the needs of others ahead of our own, we will be imitating Christ and bear fruit that will last beyond our own lifetimes. The sound from our good works will echo in eternity.