

May 13, 2018

Acts 1:15-17, 20a, 20c-26; 1 John 4:11-16; Jn 17:11b-19

We all know what it is like to want to belong. We want to connect with other people, we want to be accepted by all the groups of people we step into - and we feel it very painfully when we have been rejected and given the message that we don't belong. We have all had the experience of being in a relationship where we thought we had a connection, but really we were being used. We have all seen relationships with a group, with coworkers, with a friend or a significant other fall apart. God knows our need for connection, and God also knows the difficulty in our world of finding true and lasting connections with others. It was out of God's love for us that God comes to us as Jesus Christ to provide the ultimate way not only to be connected to God, but to be connected to each other as well.

God knows a lot about lasting personal connections. God *is* a unity of three persons - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - a unity that is so lasting that there has never been a time where they were not together, they will never be separated, and their unity is so tight that all three persons are the same God. God truly is one being - without losing identity as three persons. Things like this are possible for God but not possible for us on our own. The mysterious reality of God's unity is at the heart of the connection that God is trying to provide for us. When Jesus says in the Gospel today: *Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are one*, he is making a bold statement. He is asking that his group of followers become so united that the divisions melt away - that many persons become as one being like God is - without losing their personal identities.

Jesus goes on in his prayer: *They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one*. Jesus knows that we are meant for a connection that we can't fully get in this world. But the solution is not to just grab us up and get rid of the world. Part of our humanity is tied up in being a human who lives this life on earth. But also part of our humanity is tied up in entering into a full, true, and lasting connection with God and others. Jesus speaks what will happen when we have such a connection: *I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely*. Sharing this joy completely comes only in a communion with God and others.

Today a number of young people in our parish will make their first communion. When we speak of “communion” we mean two things. We mean that experience where we come together to share in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. In this sacrament, bread and wine become transformed and become the body and blood that Jesus promised he would provide to his followers. But this sharing in the Sacrament of Communion is meant to bring us to a fuller - a deeper - communion. Another definition of communion is: “the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, on a mental or spiritual level.” Such a sharing of intimate thoughts and feelings on a spiritual level would happen if we were united like Jesus speaks about in the Gospel today. If we were one with God we would share an intimacy with God that is satisfying, lasting, and powerful; if we were one with each other we would experience a unity of love that would break down barriers, be stable and lasting, and not fall apart because of human emotions. Today these children receive their “First Communion” - which implies that there are many more to come. For all of us, each Sacramental Communion - if we are open to the graces the Lord provides - brings us a little closer to that reality of unity Jesus spoke about today.

God is a being like no other. Through Baptism we were united to the Body of Jesus, through the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing we restore that original connection to that Body when we have separated it, and by receiving the Eucharist in the Sacrament of Communion we become more deeply transformed into that body. Remember, when we join more deeply into Christ’s body we don’t lose our identity (like the persons of the Trinity don’t lose their identity despite how closely they are joined), but we become one with all the others who have remained joined to that Body - and by being so closely united to one of the persons of the Trinity, we become perfectly united to God as well. This is the ideal Jesus speaks to us today. Not of a fleeting unity that ends when we fall out of favor, not a unity that lasts as long as we do what others want us to do. We begin to be fulfilled when united to others and to God in this world through love, and then completely fulfilled when perfectly united to God in the body of Christ after death. To gain the connection we seek in this world, we need to follow not the values and demands of the world, but the demands of the love of God. Loving others is not always easy, but when we open ourselves to do so - and when we come together in a spirit of that Love to share the Body and Blood of Jesus - we move closer to the communion that we need. As we heard today: *If we love one another, God remains in us, and God’s love is brought to perfection in us ... God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in them.*