

God's Spirit Awaits Us  
May 9, 2021, Sixth Sunday of Easter  
Gospel of John 15:9-17  
Fr. John

When I was in elementary school and learning about history, among other things historical, it was popularly understood that Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492 - almost as if, in reality, it had never existed until he had 'discovered it'.

In actuality, of course, the indigenous people that had already been here for tens of thousands of years had beaten Columbus by a long shot. They always knew they were here and didn't need to be 'discovered'.

Sometimes we carry that same 'discovery' mentality to God's Holy Spirit insofar as that Spirit is already a reality and at work - long before we discover it.

Peter found that out in his encounter with the Roman centurion, Cornelius. Up to that point Peter and his companions were of the mind that they were bringing that Spirit to the Gentiles [those of non-Jewish background] imbued as they were by their belief that Israel alone was chosen by God. Indeed they were chosen but chosen to awaken ALL people to God's unconditional love.

All that Peter had to do was to recognize that fact and celebrate it with baptism for Cornelius and his household.

This brings to mind our understanding of the mission of the Church. Our clergy retreat director last week, Archbishop Pettipas, had an interesting 'take' on that statement. Rather than speaking of a Church with a mission, he spoke of a mission that had a Church.

It's not so much a matter of us bringing the Spirit to those we consider 'unconverted' but recognizing the working of the Spirit already at work and through the process of journeying together coming to know and experience God's abiding love for all human beings and indeed all of creation.

This was the approach which Paul used when he visited Athens and drew the attention of the sophisticated Athenians that among all the temples of their gods, there was one dedicated to the unknown God. Indeed it was the very God he was proclaiming revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

All during these latter Sundays of the Easter season *that* has been the message of the letter of John in our second reading and the gospel. Love is the essence of God - it's God's DNA and our acceptance of that provides us with the ability to do wonderful things in his name.

When we experience the unconditional love that another has for us no matter what poor choices we may have made in life, there is a strength and confidence that will help us to become better versions of ourselves. And perhaps on this mother's day we know who that person has been.

Now if that's true of human love, how much more it is of God's love!

Today's gospel reading makes it plain that God's love always supersedes anything we do or fail to do. He never disinherits us. His unconditional love disarms us of our tendencies to resist because of our pride, anger, or even a feeling of unworthiness.

'You did not choose me but I chose you.' - Jesus words to you and me. It feels good to be chosen. And chosen for what? Chosen to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last. Among these are what have been identified as the fruits of the Holy Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

We try to do and be all these things not just to please God but because God loved us first.

So just as the western hemisphere existed long before Columbus stumbled upon it , may we in our own stumbling manner come to realize how much God loves us and has always loved us - His Children!