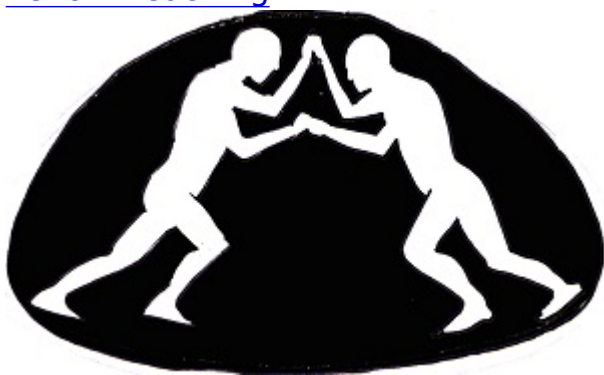


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"Remain in my love" (John 15:9).

*Acts 1:15-17, 20-26; John 15:9-17*

Today's Gospel suggests the image of concentric circles of love overflowing from God, the center and source of all love. We exist because God loves us. Jesus is loved infinitely and absolutely by his *Abba*, and he in turn loves his disciples. They in turn are to love one another, and this love creates the overflowing community of love that is the essence and energy of evangelization.

This same pattern is repeated when Jesus speaks to his disciples about knowing God. As the Father reveals everything to the Son, so the Son reveals it to the disciples. This is the full mutual self-disclosure that occurs in friendship. They are no longer servants, but friends. They in turn are sent into the world to invite others into this beloved community of friends.

This vision of friendship and unity in the fourth Gospel is contrasted to the reality described in today's first reading from Acts about the scandal of Judas' betrayal of Jesus. The symbolic value of the Twelve as successors to the twelve tribes of Israel was important enough to choose Matthias from the disciples as a replacement for Judas. Acts and the Gospel writers go to some lengths to explain how Jesus could have chosen someone who was both an informer and a traitor into his intimate, inner circle. It is presented as a source of profound suffering for Jesus, yet something he embraced as part of his redemptive sacrifice and to fulfill the scriptures. Along with his love for the world, Jesus also loved in the most personal way possible an intimate friend who turned against him. This is the real test of love.

If there is a message for us in today's Word, it may be that the church we belong to and seek our own spiritual development within has always navigated its historical and institutional life between the ideal and the reality of human weakness and failure. The good news is that the church mirrors our own struggle to balance the same ideals and realities in life. Pentecost comes as a time of renewal for all of us. The 10-day period between Ascension and Pentecost is traditionally a time of retreat and prayer to open ourselves to the purifying fire of the Spirit. Love alone can transform us, and God is about to renew that love in the church and in us at Pentecost.

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