

Week 6 (Sept. 12-18)

A Covenant Community in Manila

John 15:9-12

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹² This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Commentary:

One July weekend in 1975, at the East Asian Pastoral Institute (inside the Ateneo campus), the following prophecy was given to a group of people who wanted “more” than simply being a charismatic prayer group: “You have asked to see my face. I will show it to you. As you grow in love for one another and service towards one another, you will see my face. For I will be in your midst acting among you, working in you. You will see my face in the love you have for one another.” Then, the passage from John 15:9-12 was read, which seemed to confirm the words of the prophecy.

These two prophecies, along with that which gave the name “Ligaya,” constitute the triumvirate of our community’s prophetic beginnings. Although the word “covenant” was not mentioned, in fact it is precisely a covenant *commitment* to one another, and an ongoing covenant *relationship*, which make Christian community possible.

To understand Jesus’ words in John 15, we need to start from chapter 13. “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1). This was the way Jesus loved us (“his own”), by loving us to the cross, to the end – which was not really *the* end but really the *beginning* of a glorified existence, his and ours.

Jesus loved us the way the Father loved him; we can accept that as something “natural” to God. “God is love,” we are told (cf. 1 John 4:16). But Jesus’ “new commandment” (John 13:34) to us is something else: we are to love one another as he loved us. Surely this is not “natural” to us! “This is beyond our human capacity to do,” we protest. Our human nature is not capable of loving to such an extent. These objections would be true if we simply had ourselves to rely on. However, the glorified Lord himself lives in our midst and in our hearts by the power of his Spirit. “I will be acting among you, working in you, and you will see my face.” This is the Lord’s promise to his Ligaya, his people – the **People of the Covenant**.

For Reflection:

1. Do a *lectio divina* on this passage. (If you have more time, meditate on John 15:1-17.)
2. To “abide” means to remain. We are to “stay” in Christ’s love, always keeping the “fervor of our first love” for him.
 - How constantly and successfully do I “abide” in Christ, remaining in his love? What pulls me away from him? What might I do to abide more in him (in prayer, in holiness of life)?
 - Jesus says, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). To abide in his love requires his grace. Take a good amount of time to ask him humbly and earnestly for this grace of constancy.
3. “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). “Joy” is not the same as happiness; for C. S. Lewis, joy is a taste of heaven, compared to which mere earthly happiness is trite, shallow and fleeting. Jesus promises us that joy.
 - Have I ever experienced that heavenly “joy” in my life as a Christian? Recall those moments.
 - Have I experienced life in Ligaya as “joy”? In what ways?
 - Spend the rest of your meditation time in thanking the Lord for the joy that he has granted you to experience. It is the joy which is the result of the Spirit’s indwelling presence in us (cf. Galatians 5:22). Also express to him your desire to have *him* as your true joy forever as you “enter into the joy of your Master” (Matthew 25:21).

Scripture-Prayer:

“I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, for ever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. For your steadfast love was established for ever, your faithfulness is firm as the heavens. You have said, ‘I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: “I will establish your descendants for ever, and build your throne for all generations.”’ Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones! Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance, who exult in your name all the day, and extol your righteousness.” (*Psalms* 89:1-5, 15-16)

Intercession:

Let’s pray for the entire Sword of the Spirit community of communities: That all our brothers and sisters throughout the world might embody and live out the words of our common covenant – “*In order to respond to what God is doing among us, in order to be that people he is calling us to be, we desire to give our whole lives to him, to follow his Son Jesus, and to live more and more in the Holy Spirit. We desire to love and serve him in lives of daily prayer and service; to praise and worship him always; to ever seek his face; to know and serve the truth of his Word in the joy, peace, and love of the Holy Spirit; to believe what he speaks to us and to be obedient to the truth of his Word and the guidance of his Spirit; to offer hospitality to those whom he sends us; to widen our hearts to receive those he adds to our number; and to carry out the mission that he is entrusting to us. Above all, we desire to be a people who always grow, by his great mercy, in the fervor of that first love he has given us, he who is our all. We desire to consecrate our lives to him not simply as individuals but as members of a people, members of the Sword of the Spirit.*”