

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The more that I read my Bible, the more I read it as a series of love letters that God has written to us. In the beginning, though he had created a beautiful world in which he delighted, he needed someone to share his joy, to love his creation as much as he did. So, God created humanity, “in his own image and likeness God created them, male and female he created them.” Not only did God want humanity to share his joy and delight in the world he provided us, he wanted us to love him for all that he had given us, and show that love by obeying just one simple rule. We couldn’t do it!

Many thousands of years passed, only God knows how many, and the whole earth was filled with violence and hatred and corruption (kind of sounds like our world today, doesn’t it?). God couldn’t let it go on. So, he looked to Noah, the last decent, honest, just, and righteous man on the earth, and told him to prepare to save his family and all his created beings because God had no recourse but to cleanse the earth from evil by sending the great flood. When Noah finally found dry land, God entered into a covenant with him. He promised Noah he would never again destroy the earth with floods and He offered as a sign that He would keep his promise by sending a rainbow. Therefore, every time we see a rainbow we are reminded of God’s promise that He will never give up on us again.

Hundreds of more years pass and once again humanity turned away from God. So God decided he would form a special people that He might call His own who could serve as a model for the rest of humanity. He called Abraham to leave his father’s house and go where God would lead Him. When Abraham showed he would be faithful and obedient to all that God asked of him, God entered into a covenant, a solemn promise, with him that his descendants would be as many as the stars of the sky and that he would be the father of a great nation.

However, Abraham’s descendants fell on hard times by the time his great-grandson, Joseph, came along and they wound up being enslaved in Egypt. To save his people and set them free, God then called forth Moses to go to the Pharaoh to demand, “Let my people go!” Still the people rebelled against God and He sought to draw them closer to them by sealing their relationship with the Law, the Ten Commandments. God told his people through Moses that if you simply live according to this Law of the Lord, you shall always be my people and I will always be your God.

Again and again God’s people turned away from Him, but God has been relentless in seeking their love. So he sent them Judges and Kings and Prophets, asking them to turn back to Him with all their hearts. Even when he promised David that his Kingship would last forever in his descendants, God’s people continued to ignore Him.

But God would not be thwarted in His desire to love and be loved by humanity. His plan would be realized. From the mouth of the Prophet, Jeremiah, God speaks, “The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with my people. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant, and I had to show them myself their master, says the Lord. This is the covenant that I will make with my people after those days, says the Lord. I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives how to know the Lord. All, from the least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.”

Jesus, of course, is the fulfillment of all the promises that God made in the covenants He entered into with Noah and Abraham, Moses and David. In our Gospel, when these Greeks come, wanting to see Jesus, the Lord’s response is somewhat puzzling. He tells them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”. He seems to be telling them, “If you really want to see me for who I really am, you’ll have to wait a bit. When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.”

In his response to these strangers, Jesus admits that he is “troubled”. This is the same word that John used when Jesus saw Martha and Mary weeping after the death of their brother, Lazarus. He’s really saying that the very thought of what he’ll have to endure shakes him to the very core of his being. The depth of his anguish is caught by the Sacred Writer of our Second Reading from Hebrews when he says, “In the days when Christ Jesus was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the One who was able to save him from death.” Yet, he knows that “it was for this purpose that I have come to this hour.” Only in this will the Father truly be glorified, that is, loved.

Jesus knew that he didn’t come into the world to condemn the world, as God did in the time of Noah and as He promised never to do again. He came to fulfill God’s promise to Abraham that his descendants would be as plentiful as the stars of the sky; he came to fulfill God’s promise to Moses that he would lead his people out of the slavery of sin to a promised land, flowing with goodness and love; and he came to fulfill God’s promise to David that his Kingdom would be an everlasting Kingdom.

By surrendering himself to the torture and ignominy of the Cross, Jesus is telling us this is how much God our Father loves you that I will die for you. I will take your evil and sins upon myself. In this way, Jeremiah’s prophecy is fulfilled, “All from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.

Finally, Jesus says to these strangers, and to us, who would like to see him, “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be.” He’s telling us the best way to see him, the best way to know him is to follow him in self-surrender. This is how God will be glorified in us. This is how God wants us to love him back—to put the needs of others before our own; to continue his work of bringing people together; to see ourselves in those we might be tempted to think of as “other”.

This New Covenant that God makes with us in Christ is a unilateral promise. It has nothing to do with our worthiness or good behavior. It is the promise of God’s unrelenting love and his deepest desire that we should love him too. But, even if we don’t, there is nothing we can ever do to turn God against us. Our God will always and forever be God who is for us. And the sign of that truth; the sign of that unrelenting, unconditional love is the Sign of the Cross.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.