

**MAY 6, 2018**

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Reading 1 [ACTS 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 98:1, 2-3, 3-4](#)

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R. (cf. 2b) **The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.**

Reading 2 [1 JN 4:7-10](#)

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Gospel [JN 15:9-17](#)

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Jesus said to his disciples: "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy might be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another."

HOMILY

Here's a classic, vaudeville joke, mercifully short: "A horse walked into a bar. The bartender says, 'why the long face?'" [That's it!] That figure of speech, "a long face," has come to mean a sadness or lack of joy. Of course, the horse can't help itself—biology, evolution, and ultimately its creator gave it this long face. One source explained, "The long face is a genetic adaptation. A long face of horses allows the eyes to remain above the grasses while eating and see predators farther away." So, that's the explanation for the horse. What about for us? "Why the long face?" is an important question for followers of Jesus, especially after what he says in today's gospel, that he has taught us that our "joy might be complete." Instead, knowing that Jesus has come that we might have complete joy, and admitting that we do, too often, come to life with long faces, let's use that bartender's question as an examination of the state of our Christian life.

"Why the long face?" Of course, life throws things at us that can lead to sorrow, sadness, fear, or just wear us down. But, even with that, we remember the example of the early believers, whose lives are recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles* from which we have been hearing during this season after Easter. For example, when St. Peter and the other apostles were on trial before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious judges, we hear: "After recalling the apostles, they had them flogged, ordered them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them. So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name." Acts 5:40-41 Being flogged—a certain reason to have a "long face," and yet the disciples are filled with joy, as the Lord promised.

So, for us, no matter what life has thrown at us, "why the long face?" if we remember *we have been chosen as children of God?* "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you." A long face of worry results from thinking that I have to find God, that my world is all about me, that I am responsible for joy in my life and will clutch after it. But Jesus says, "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you." Perhaps our long face comes from failing to remember that,

above all, what is most important is not what we want, but what God calls and chooses for us. A long face? Maybe we have to “face” the fact that we’re choosing what we want instead of the life God has chosen for us.

“Why the long face?” if we remember *we are sent by God*? “I have appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain.” Maybe our long faces come, after we have been chosen in baptism, that we fail to go where the Lord has sent us. Probably we’ve convinced ourselves that our way is the way to joy, even while we carry around, too often, those long faces. Inasmuch as we try to set the course of our lives ourselves, we will not find complete joy. But if we follow His way, as believers since the beginning have discovered, we lose ourselves, our heavy, ponderous selves, and find the lightness of the life of God. If we daily ask in prayer, “where and to whom would you send me today to bear your fruit that remains,” we ought to expect joy to burst into life.

“Why the long face?” if we remember *we are to bear fruit that will remain*? This “fruit that remains” is the very essence and heart of the life of the Christian. It is LOVE. Maybe we have forgotten to seek above all this fruit that remains, but instead are chasing after things and relationships that do not last. When we love, we know joy, simple as that. And what is this love? From our tradition, it is simply “willing the good of the other as other.” In other words, I want to do what is necessary and to make whatever sacrifice for the good of my beloved who is not me. It is an other-centered sacrifice of my wants for their needs. The person who loves deeply lives joyfully, as the Lord has intended for us.

Can we have the courage to ask, not about others, but about ourselves, each of us, “why the long face?” Until we do, joy will allude us. “Why the long face?” Maybe we have forgotten that we are chosen by God, sent by him and are to bear love to others and instead have chosen to go our own way. Maybe we have failed to appreciate and accept that we are, each of us, chosen, sent, and prepared to bear the fruit of love that always leads to the fullness of life that is joy.

A horse walked into a bar. The bartender asked, “why the long face.” That poor horse can’t help it—it was made with that long face. But we were not made for long faces. To find the joy for which we were created, let us recall that we are chosen, called and sent to bear the fruit that is love and always leads to joy. Let us come now to He who is love, be filled with His love, and as His chosen disciples, receive again His sending, equipped with the love that brings others a joy that overflows into our own lives in abundance.