

Last week, John's gospel taught us that Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. We learned that the way to travel through this pilgrimage of life with the least difficulty is to stay close to the Lord. Abide in him. Keep his commandments and keep his company. Keep him close to your heart in prayer and in the sacraments. He will protect you by being with you, by abiding in you.

This week John's gospel teaches us that Jesus disciples have not chosen Him, but he has chosen them. God, in his grace, has approached us with a call, he has made us an offer, and an offer made out of his love. He has chosen us to receive that grace. From this Gospel passage I think we can put together a number of things for which we are chosen and to which we are called.

First of all, Jesus says we are chosen for joy.

"I have spoken these things so that my joy might be in you, and that your joy might be complete.

However hard being a Christian is, however difficult this pilgrimage on earth ends up being, it is meant to be a journey of joy. A journey lived within the Joy of Christ. In our consumer culture, we are made to think that our joy depends on things. I will be happy when, I can purchase this, when I get this new job, when I accomplish this. When I was a young man I served in the Peace Corp in Liberia West Africa. The average income for a Liberian at that time was about \$350 dollars a year—that's right, roughly a dollar a day. Most people live with the clothes on their back and managed to get themselves one good meal a day. But they were happy. I didn't meet anyone who was depressed or anxious. It seemed like they were always looking for opportunities to sing and dance. And I was reading about a French Jesuit priest who was serving in the Amazon rainforest of Brazil. This priest was living on an island with an indigenous tribe: due to the tribe's isolation it was very self-sufficient, and their entire culture revolved around the monkey, both for nourishment

and for religious ceremonies. He said, “I don’t know what I am doing here, what do I have to teach these people? Then he was asked, “ But what do they teach you?” He immediately replied in French “La joie. La joie. Joy. They experience more joy in a day than my people do in a lifetime.” Think about it....A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms. I like to paraphrase St. Irenaeus on this topic. “The glory of God is the human person fully alive in Christ.” Being joyful means being fully alive. There is always a joy in doing the right thing. The Christian person is meant to be a person of joy. We may all be sinners but we are redeemed sinners, we are forgiven, and we are walking the paths of life with Jesus. How can we be anything but joyous?

In addition to be chosen for joy we are are chosen for love.

This is the gospel where Jesus presents his greatest commandment. Love one another. He has sent us out into the world to love one another as he has loved us. But in this world

we are sent into, we find competition, we find injustice, we find disputes and wars. The reality we are faced with, the reality of this world is often not very loving, and it seems like the opposite. How can the Jesus expect us to do this? Love one another...even the people I really don't like being around? Jesus says "No man can show greater love than to lay down his life for a friend—and I have done this." Jesus is being the Master teacher here, he has given a difficult commandment, but he has done it himself. He laid down his life for us. He fulfilled that commandment.... He showed us how.

In this gospel we also find that we are chosen to be Christ's friends, and the friends of the Father.

Christ offers us an intimacy with God that not even the greatest of men knew about before he came into the world. "I have something greater for you yet, you are no longer slaves; you are

friends.” This is a tremendous offer. It means we no longer have to gaze longingly at God from afar. We are not like slaves who have no right to enter into the presence of the Master. We are not like a crowd whose only opportunity to see the King is as he passes by on some official occasion. Jesus gave us this intimacy with God, so that he is no longer a distant stranger to us; but our close friend.

And Jesus has chosen us to be his advertisements of sorts. He chose us to go out and bear fruit that will stand the test of time. This is true evangelization. The best way to spread Christianity is to be an example of the best Christian you can be. The way to bring others to the Christian faith is to show them the fruits of the Christian life. Jesus sends us out, not to debate others into becoming Christian, but to show them the fruits of the Christian life. Not to threaten them into it, but to attract them into it. To live

in such a way that the fruits of your life will be so obvious others will want that for themselves.

In addition to being chosen for joy and friendship and love, Jesus chooses us to be privileged members of God's family. He chooses us so that whatever we ask in his name the Father will give to us. And we have to understand this correctly. We must pray with hope and the faith that we are being heard and responded to. We pray in the name of Jesus, knowing that whatever we ask for he would approve. Our prayer may not be answered in the way we expect them to be answered, but they are being answered. He is our friend, he loves us, and he is listening.