

May 10, 2015
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Acts 10:44-48; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

In the First Reading today we have the account of one of the first Gentile converts to Christianity, Cornelius the Centurion. Cornelius had a vision of an Angel who told him that God had recognized his good deeds and that he should send his men to bring Simon Peter to him.

At more or less the same time Peter himself had a dream in which he saw a big sheet being let down from heaven containing many unclean animals and he was told by a voice from heaven to kill and eat them. As a devout Jewish man, Peter did certainly didn't want to eat anything unclean but he was told by the voice three times that nothing made by God was unclean and to kill and eat the animals.

So it's in this dream that Peter comes to understand that the Word of God was intended not only for the Jews but for the Gentiles too. Peter then goes off with the men Cornelius had sent and then the events given in today's First Reading occur. The Holy Spirit was poured out on them all and Peter baptized Cornelius and his entire household.

This is a wonderful story of the early church and it shows how the newly born Church was guided by the Holy Spirit to fulfill her mission in accordance with God's will.

And for many of those early Christians that meant fulfilling the mission of the Church lead to intense persecutions. So today's Gospel must have been a source of strength and encouragement for struggling Christians everywhere.

Because of John's insight into the great gift of self-sacrificing love, those early martyrs could understand their personal suffering, or the "laying down of one's life", in terms of their love for Jesus and for one another.

In addition to that, they could find strength in the knowledge that their suffering and even their deaths could not sever their union with Jesus, the true vine and source of their life. Such suffering could also be accepted as part of the pruning process, which increased the fruitfulness of the vine and branches, the church.

Today, 20 centuries later, after periods of fruitfulness and times of barrenness, after much pruning, many conversions, much repentance and many recommitments to Jesus – the vine and the branches continue to grow through the gifts and grace of the Holy Spirit. But we must never forget, as our readings today clearly indicate, that this growth is only possible if Jesus remains in us and we in him.