

Notes on the readings for Easter 6.

Old Testament: Acts 10.44-48

St Peter had been asleep and had a dream that he was to eat all sorts of 'unclean' animals. This was followed by an instruction to receive a visitor inviting him to the house of Cornelius the Centurion and a Gentile, and to go without hesitation. The reading this morning picks up the story. When he arrived, Cornelius explains that he's had a vision whilst at prayer, telling him to send for Peter. Peter then preaches the good news of Jesus Christ, and as he talks, the Holy Spirit falls on the Gentile family, much to the amazement of the Jewish party with Peter. They now realise that the gospel is for all people and not just for the Jews. Cornelius and his family were baptised, and Peter and his companions were invited to stay for a while. This gave him the opportunity for teaching further about the new relationship to Jesus Christ. This account marks a major step forward in the reaching out of the Church.

Epistle: 1 John 5: 1-6

The theme throughout John's epistle is that love of God goes hand in hand with love of one another. We show this love by obeying his commands. This begins to look rather like the command to the Jews to be obedient to the Law. But this is not so. Love cannot be ordered; it is a gift, freely offered. The whole point is that we are in a relationship with God, defined as one of love. Just as in human love, each partner is obedient to the other, seeking to do what pleases them, not out of compulsion, but freely offered. As Jesus says in the gospel, we are his friends and not servants and therefore the relationship is quite different.

Gospel: John 15: 9-17

The gospel today follows on from that of last week, the parable of the vine and the branches. God prepares us to be his people in the world. Here, the nature of the bond between Jesus and his Church is spoken of in intimate and warm terms. We are to look at Jesus as our pattern, and through whom we are able to share in God's love. The sort of love is spelt out in vv 13,14 – and can be defined in terms of self-giving. We are Jesus' friends, and therefore are privileged to know his inner thoughts and hopes. There is no pride to be gained from our friendship - it was Jesus who chose us and not the opposite; and he did so that we should produce the fruit of lives prepared to give loving service to others.