

6th Sunday Easter Cycle B

May 17, 2009

Abp. Thomas Kelly of Louisville tells this story about the day he became the bishop. Thomas Kelly made it a point to have breakfast with his mother on the morning the news was made public so that he could be with her when she heard the news on the radio. When her son's appointment was announced during the morning news, Mrs. Kelly was thrilled. She leaned across the table and asked, "What is it like for you to be made bishop?" Kelly explained to his mother how he felt, and as he spoke, his mother sat with her chin in her hand, almost in a reverie. When he had finished, there was a pause. Mrs. Kelly sighed and said, "*You know, Tommy, if I had known that one day you would become a bishop and have your picture in the newspapers and on television, I would have had your teeth straightened.*"

The great preacher Billy Graham once said, "People put me on a pedestal I don't deserve." Peter has to say to Cornelius, who had fallen to the ground in homage, "Get up! I am only a man!"

It's really important for a Catholic Christian to realize that our faith is basically a relationship--a relationship not with the pope, not with the church, not with the priest--but a relationship with the Risen Jesus Christ. Popes, bishops, and priests may thrill or disappoint us, but in the end, they are humans like the rest of us. And they come and they go. Even church buildings change dramatically, as we are about to experience here at St. Bernadette.

Jesus remains. He laid down his life for us. He wishes to be our friend. We meet Jesus in this church that he himself founded. We meet him in the Eucharist, in the other sacraments, in the community. No matter who is preaching, or what the bishop has been saying, or how the parking is, Jesus is here, in our midst. He laid down his life for us. And he wants to be our friend.

And what does God ask of us? That we love one another. Jesus made no exceptions. Christians are not free to pick and choose who is worthy of our love. Jesus gave his life for everyone; the rain comes down on the bad and the good. God is love. Who are we to sometimes be loving, sometimes not?

And how do we become more loving? By remaining in Jesus. By spending time with Jesus, our friend. Last Tuesday I met a lady whom I'm positive is a friend of Jesus. I stopped into a fudge shop on Kelly's Island in Lake Erie. "Have you seen the lilac trail yet?" "No, I walked a lot of miles and decided to skip it." "You really need to see the lilac trail at this time of year; it's a little bit of heaven." Then she said, "Here, take my keys. Drive up there. I don't need the car for awhile." Complete stranger. "Here, take my keys."

And I realized she's like that all day long. She's not selling fudge. *She's healing the world--with God's love.*

The Church may disappoint us sometimes. Bishops may have crooked teeth and a lot more problems than that. Priests are flawed, just like everyone else. But Jesus is here. Our job is to be his friend, and eventually to have his heart, his love for all people.