

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

(Year B)

<i>First Reading</i>	Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48
<i>Response</i>	The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 John 4:7-10
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord, and my Father will love him and we will come to him.
<i>Gospel</i>	John 15:9-17

The Sixth Sunday of Easter for Year B takes us further into the Gospel of John with Jesus' Last Supper discourse. So last week we were looking at the famous image of the vine and the branches, and this Sunday the gospel picks up right where last week left off and continues into Jesus' teaching on the new commandment, the commandment to love one another as he has loved us. So we're going to begin with the gospel and then we'll go back and look at the Acts of the Apostles once again, as in previous studies. So this week's gospel is from John 15:9-17 and it's all focused on love, and this is what Jesus says:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.
If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.
"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should

abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another.¹

Okay, what's the meaning of these words in the gospel today? Let's highlight a few elements here. First, we want to remember that the context of these words is Jesus' discourse to the disciples at the Last Supper. So everything that Jesus is saying here is being said within the context of sharing this meal with his disciples before he dies and having given to them his body and his blood under the appearance of food and drink at this Passover meal. So in that context Jesus has just given an allegory of the vine and the branches, which is I pointed out in a previous video was a Eucharistic image, right, that Christ is the vine we are the branches, and the fruit of the vine is, of course, the blood of the grape, from which we make wine, the fruit of the grape. And, so in that Eucharistic context, Jesus is taking the analogy of the vine and the branches even further and giving us an image for what it means to abide in him and what it means to bear fruit, with a particular focus on love, which in Greek is the word is *agapē*, this sacrificial love that he's calling his disciples to carry out and to emulate in him. And, so he says here that the Father has loved me and so I have loved you, and he tells them to abide in his love, to abide in his *agapē*, to abide in this divine love that he gives to us. And, the way we do that is by keeping his commandments. So he says if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I who kept the Father's commandments abide in his love.

So notice the stress here that Jesus puts on obedience. I want to say this again, there are some Christian traditions that will say all that matters is faith, works don't matter at all, all you have to do is believe in Jesus, accept him as your savior and then you can never lose your salvation. Well that's just not true. If you look at what Jesus says in the scripture itself, in order to remain in him, to be a branch that's united to the vine and therefore receiving its life from the vine, we have to keep his commandments, we have to obey his teachings. If we fail to keep his commandments, then think here of all the major commandments, you know, against adultery or idolatry, if we break the commandments we are cut off from the vine, we're cut

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

off from the source of our life, we're cut off from the love of Christ, the saving love of Christ which should fill us with his grace and fill us with his life. If we reject that love, we also reject that life, the life of salvation.

So he says to them, I'm telling you these things so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete — or the RSV here has full, but it can also mean complete. And — I want you to highlight that element — notice, what is the fruit of obedience to Christ? Well, it's joy. Now that is a radical countercultural claim, okay. If you look at scripture over and over again, what the devil will try to do is tempt people into thinking that true freedom means not having to obey the commandments of God, and that if we break his commandments then we're going to have pleasure, then we're going to have happiness, right, and that God's commandments are meant to prohibit us, they're meant to constrain us to keep us from being happy, when precisely the opposite is true. It's his commandments that are the path to happiness, it's his commandments that are the path to joy. It's joy that is the fruit of keeping his word, of keeping his commandments. So I just think that's something for us really to ponder because the world today, which it always has done this but in our day it's particularly emphatic, claims that if we want to be joyful, if we want to be happy, what we need is license, which means the ability to do whatever we want, and that's how we'll find joy, that's how we'll find happiness, right. When in fact the opposite is true. It's through obedience to God that we're going to find joy, it's through obedience to God that we'll find peace. And, try it some time, you'll figure it out pretty quickly. License, doing whatever we want, whether it hurts us or hurts someone else, is the surest path to misery, to unhappiness, right, to despair. So this is part of the pedagogy of God's plan, as part of his plan of teaching us the truth about how to find happiness and true joy.

So in that context here Jesus says his commandment is that we love one another as he has loved us. Alright, now he ups the ante here. He's calling us not just to love but to love sacrificially, right, to the kind of love that not just chooses the good of another but chooses the good of someone else over and above our own good, even to the point of laying down our life for the sake of the other, right. And, so here this is where theologians will get the claim that *agapē*, the kind of love Jesus is describing here, is a particular kind of love, it's the greatest form of love, it's a sacrificial love because it's Christlike in its form; it's the kind of love that lays down its

life for the sake of the other. That's the kind of love with which Christ loved us and that's the love that he's calling us through the apostles to love with as well. For us it's going to look different in each of our lives but, in a very real way this is almost a kind of prophecy, because if you look at the apostle's lives, the majority of them are actually going to go on to be martyrs, to actually lay down their lives for the sake of the other, for the sake of the gospel. Christ is giving them that commission already here at the Last Supper. In other words, if you want to love with Christ's love, if you want to love like Christ loves, there's risk involved, there's danger involved, there's no safety in *agapē*, right; there's no safety in self-sacrificial love, but what there is in that kind of love is joy, is peace, is happiness, right.

Now after Jesus lays out this definition of the highest form of love, of this sacrificial love, of the love that he's calling his disciples to, he also then goes on to say something interesting. He says here, "You are my friends if you do what I command you." Now only Jesus can talk like this. I mean this is one of those sayings of Jesus that would have originally sounded like a kind of a riddle here, because if you stop and think about it for minute, if someone comes up to you and says, "Hey I want to be your friend. Would you want to be my friend?" Well you'd say, "Well sure I'll be your friend." And they say, "Okay great. If you want to be my friend you have to do whatever I tell you." That's going to be an immediate impediment to the friendship. That's not how ordinary human friendships work, right. There's not a contingency of obedience built into the friendship, right. But in this case, Jesus is no ordinary friend and the friendship that he's calling the apostles to is no ordinary friendship, because he's not just fully man, he's also fully God, and therefore they do have to keep his commandments in order to remain in this friendship of love with him, in order to acquire the joy that being a friend of Christ entails. And, so what he's trying to do here is lead them to a deeper form of love and he says to them, "I no longer call you servants." The Greek word here is actually a little stronger, it could be translated slaves; I think the New American Bible actually does translate it as slaves. So he's saying to them, I'm not calling you slaves anymore, I'm calling my friends, I'm calling you into a deeper relationship with me. And the reason I don't call you slaves is because I have revealed my heart to you, I've told you everything that the Father has taught me; I haven't held anything back from you. He says a slave doesn't always know what his master is doing, but friends share with one another, they share their hearts with one another, they share

knowledge with one another. So you now are my friends, you are truly my friends because everything that I've heard from the Father I have told it to you.

If you look in the history of the church, this distinction between servants, friends and then the highest form of love, which is sacrificial love, is something that's actually going to be developed by theologians. They're going to talk about how in the spiritual life people will go through a kind of growth in the love of God. First, there's a servile love of God, where we fear God and we obey him in the same way a servant obeys it's master, you know, both out of reverence for the master but also out of fear. But then there's a love of friendship whereby we do what the other person wills, not out of fear, but out of fraternal love for one another. And then finally, the highest form of love is going to be this *agapē*, which is not just seeking the good that a friend can give us, right, but actually laying down our life for the sake of the friend in sacrificial love. A great book on that if you ever want to research it is by CS Lewis, it is called *The Four Loves*, where he traces out these different kinds of love and how they were evaluated both in the Greek philosophical tradition but also in the Christian tradition; it's a classic work. In any case here, we see Christ calling the apostles to the highest form of love, sacrificial love. They're no longer servants, they are friends now, and the greatest form of love that a friend can show is to lay down his life for the other, which is exactly what he's about to do for them the very next day. Again, don't forget the context; this is the eve of his passion, this is the eve of his death. He hasn't yet shown them what that love looks like because he hasn't gone to the cross yet, but he's preparing them for the cross; he's preparing them to see the cross not just as an execution, but as an act of love by explaining to them that the greatest form of love is sacrificial love, and that's what he's going to do the very next day on Good Friday.

Finally, notice here that Jesus reveals something powerful about vocation. He says this to the apostles, "You didn't choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide," right. What does that mean? Well this is again another revelation of Christ's divinity, right, insofar as he is fully man, right, he's a human being, he lives in time and space, he chooses the apostles, right, and they accept his invitation to come and be members of his entourage, members of his college of apostles. On the other hand though, there's a real sense in which as God from all eternity, it is he who chooses them, right; it is

he who calls them from all time to go out and to bear this fruit, the fruit of charity, the fruit of their apostolic work that's going to remain for all eternity. The effects of the apostle's labors remain with us to this day in the church, just look around. One billion Catholics worldwide, just right now, that's just the ones that are alive. All of us are in some sense the fruit of the apostles' work, the fruit of the apostles charity, the fruit of their labor of going out and bearing witness to the gospel and laying down their lives so that we might know the truth about Christ and his church. So it's a powerful, powerful passage here, kind of almost like a prophecy of what is to come in the lives of the apostles who can emulate Jesus himself in laying down their lives for us and for the sake of the gospel.

Okay, so that's a little bit of insight into the gospel for this week. Let's back up now and look at the Acts of the Apostles. So if we go back to the first reading for today, once again because it's Easter there's no Old Testament reading, we have a reading from the Acts of the Apostles looking at the spread of the good news in the early church. And in this case, we have one of my favorite chapters from Acts, it's the famous story of Cornelius, the Gentile Centurion, and in his conversion to Christianity. And so again, as is the case with the other readings we've looked at, the reading itself in the missal, in the lectionary, is rather short, but I want to put it in context for you so we can get the most out of it.

So a couple of key points here. The reading is from Acts 10, and if you go back to the beginning of that chapter you'll see a few things about the identity of Cornelius and the context of what Peter's about to say. So the first point is this, the whole story revolves around this figure of Cornelius, who was a centurion of the Italian cohort of the Roman army. So a Centurion was an officer in the Roman army who was set over 100 men. So he had 100 men under his guard and in this case the Italian cohort means he's leading a group that's actually from Italy. And these Roman cohorts would be composed of men often who were from the same region, so that there would be a kind of fraternity or brotherhood amongst them as they fought in battle. And in this case the Book of Acts actually tells us that Cornelius wasn't just any Centurion. In Acts 10:2 it says that he was a devout man who feared God with all his household and gave alms liberally to the people and who prayed constantly to God. So this isn't an ordinary Centurion, this man already believes in the God of Israel, fears their God and doesn't just pray to God but also gives alms to the poor.

So what we see in him is an interesting combination of a pagan who expresses love of God, through his prayer to God, and love of neighbor through his alms giving, right; and there were actually many of these throughout the ancient world. As Judaism spread throughout the Roman Empire, a group of pagans arose known as God fearers, and these were pagans who accepted the belief in the one God they were monotheists in the sense that they believed in the God of Israel. Sometimes they would even attend synagogue, they would pray to the one God, but they did not receive circumcision, so they didn't become Jewish, they didn't enter into the covenant of the people of Israel.

So Cornelius appears to be one of these God fearers, and what's fascinating about this is that in Acts 10:4 an angel comes to Cornelius and says to him that his prayers and his alms have ascended as a memorial before God, that they have been heard by God. And so what happens is the angel sends Cornelius to find Peter, to find Simon Peter, the head of the apostles, so that they can have an encounter with one another. Now that's also fascinating because what it shows us is that if you have a pagan like Cornelius, who fears God and who loves his neighbor, that God hears his prayers, right. He doesn't have to be a member of the covenant of Israel for God to hear his prayers if he's honestly and genuinely seeking him and seeking to love God and to love his neighbor. And so what happens here in our reading for today is that Peter and Cornelius encounter one another, and so let's look at that encounter. So this encounter takes place between Simon Peter and Cornelius right after Peter has a vision, a famous vision of a sheet descending from heaven with all kinds of unclean animals on it, and God tells him rise, kill and eat. And Peter says well I've never eaten anything unclean but God repeats the command to him. So Peter is being told by God that those laws of clean and unclean in the Old Testament have been abrogated, right, that he's no longer bound by them. After Peter has that vision, this is the reading for today:

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." And Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised

who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Okay, now what I just read to you were really excerpts from a much longer account of the exchange between Peter and Cornelius in the book of Acts. I would strongly encourage you to go back and read all of Acts 10 if you want to get all the details. For our purposes here though I'd just like to highlight a few elements of why I think the church has chosen these particular verses to highlight. So number one, the first section that she focuses on is Peter's encounter, initial encounter, with Cornelius. When Cornelius first meets Peter, he falls down at Peter's feet and worships him. Now what's that all about? Well first of all, Cornelius has had a vision where an angel has spoken to him and sent him to Peter, right. And one of the things that you will see in pagan conversions to early Christianity, is that the pagans had a very open idea about the line between divinity and humanity. In other words, they would frequently mistake the apostles for being divine human beings. You see this actually in the account of Paul preaching the gospel in the city of Ephesus. When Paul and Barnabas are there and they began performing miracles and healings and preaching the gospel, some of the pagans in the city of Ephesus actually begin bringing out oxen and things to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas because they say the gods have come down among us as men, right. And so what we see here is that although Cornelius is a righteous man, although he is a fearer of God, although he gives alms and he's very friendly toward the Jewish people, he still has pagan errors in his mind. In other words, when he encounters Peter who is this miracle worker, a wonderworker, a preacher of the gospel, his initial response is to treat Peter as he would've treated him as a pagan, namely to fall down and worship him as a kind of divine man, as someone who has come down from heaven. So Peter obviously tells him don't worship me, stand up, I'm a man.

Now you might be thinking, as a Catholic here, well hold on, don't we Catholics venerate the Saints, you know, what's Peter talking about. Well I just, as a side note, would highlight here that the word Peter uses, *prosyneō*, to worship him, is

the same word that Jesus uses in the Gospel of Luke or in the Gospel of Matthew when the devil tries to get him to worship the devil. And Jesus says, you know, you shall worship the Lord your God alone, and the word is *prosyneō* there. So that word is reserved for the kind of worship that we give to God in a Jewish context, but in a pagan context you could not just worship Zeus but you could worship the Emperor, you could worship, you know, Hermes if he came down in the form of a man, right. So we see that although this pagan man is a devout man who fears God, he still has some errors in his mind, right, he's not completely free from error here. When Peter tells him stand up I'm a human being and then Peter begins to kind of preach and to teach here and notice what he says. The second thing the church focuses on here is the relationship between God and the pagans, between God and the nations, between God and those peoples of the world who don't have the divine revelation that was given to the Jews in the form of the Torah, the law, and the old covenant in the Scriptures. And so Peter says something amazing here he says, "Truly now I perceive that God shows no partiality, but that in every nation anyone who fears him and does right is acceptable to him." What does this mean? Well first there's a statement of universality. God does not show partiality, very important. Sometimes people will assume that when God chooses Israel in the Old Testament it means that he necessarily rejects all other human beings. In other words, you'll sometimes encounter this caricature of the God of the Bible that in the Old Testament he chooses the Jews and rejects the Gentiles, and that in the New Testament he changes his mind and chooses the Gentiles and rejects the Jews. That is just a false, completely false caricature of the God of the Bible. What the God of the Bible does is in the Old Testament chooses Israel so that through Israel he might give light and life to the nations. It was always to save the world through Israel, not to choose Israel and then damn the world.

So what we're seeing here is that God doesn't show any partiality based on a person's nationality; in every nation anyone who fears him, so in other words recognizes him right, and who does what is right is acceptable to him. So what is Peter describing there? Well it's what Paul in his letters would call faith and works, right. To fear God, to believe in him, but also to do his will, to do his commandments, to keep the commandments of God. Although it's Peter speaking here, Paul says something similar in the letter to the Romans 2. He says the Gentiles who don't have the law, if they keep the law they are a law unto themselves, right. In other

words, they can do what the law requires insofar as the law is written on their hearts, right. It's a kind of mysterious act by which through grace they keep the law and they fear God and love their neighbor. Well in context, Peter here is talking about Cornelius, right. He sees in Cornelius the example of what would later be called a righteous Gentile or a righteous pagan, someone who through God's grace has come to recognize the truth of the one God and also come to love his neighbor and to be a man who keeps the commandments. So what Peter is saying here is that this Gentile Centurion Cornelius is not going to be rejected by God just because he's from the wrong part of the world, right, but that anyone who does what Cornelius does, whatever nation they're from, is acceptable to God.

Now the third aspect of this encounter that the church highlights is the result here, and I would call this result a kind of new Pentecost or a second Pentecost, right. So if you go back to the book of Acts at the beginning in chapter two, what happens? We have the 12 apostles and Mary and all those Jewish disciples of Jesus, they're gathered in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit comes down from heaven on Pentecost, fills them with his grace, and they begin to speak in tongues and share the gospel. That's the first Pentecost, it's focused on believers in Christ, all of whom were Jewish. But now in Acts 10, Cornelius bring something new; we see that the Holy Spirit falls on pagan believers. Now after hearing Peter's words, they accept the gospel and the Holy Spirit falls upon them and it says believers from among the circumcised, in other words the Jewish Christians who came with Peter, were amazed because the Holy Spirit has been poured out even upon these pagans, even upon Cornelius the Centurion and his fellow Gentiles. And not only do they receive the Holy Spirit, but they begin to speak in tongues just like the apostles had done at Pentecost. So some scholars have called this like a second Pentecost. The first was for Jewish Christian believers, the second is for these Gentile believers. And notice how Peter responds, he says, can anyone here forbid taking water in order to baptize these Gentiles, right, and of course the answer is no. Because if they've already received the grace of Pentecost, right, then certainly you cannot withhold from them the grace of baptism. And so Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles are baptized and, in a sense, usher in the beginning of the conversion of the nations, the beginning of the conversion of the Gentiles. This is kind of like the first fruits of the conversion of the whole world.

So this is a major moment in the history of the church; this is a major episode in the history of the church. The baptism of Cornelius and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon these Gentiles is truly a kind of new Pentecost or a second Pentecost. Now why does that matter? Well there's so many things we could talk about here. Let me just make a couple of quick points. First, I think it's important for us to remember here that this is a good example of how God has bound salvation to his sacraments but he himself is not bound by his sacraments, right, because what we have here is a situation where pagans, like Cornelius, are praying to God and he hears their prayers. We have a case here where unbaptized pagans receive the same grace of the Holy Spirit that the apostles received at Pentecost. Why? Because God wished to reveal to Peter and to the Jewish Christians that he had in fact opened the door of salvation to the nations and that the dividing wall between Israel and the Gentiles that was known in the Old Testament had now come crashing down. This was really important. They needed a kind of extraordinary sign to show that the Gentiles were welcome in the new covenant people of God. Jesus had already given us some clues, like the healing of the Syrophenician woman, or the healing of the Centurion servant in the gospels, or even the casting out of the Gerasene demoniac, who was probably a pagan. So we see these little signs that the good news is going to come to the pagans, but it's really with the baptism and conversion of Cornelius that the Gentile mission so to speak begins. And that is important, it begins with Peter and that's really crucial. Sometimes people will present a caricature of the Gentile mission in the early church and sometimes people will even pit Paul against Peter and they will say, well Peter did not believe that the gospel should go to the Gentiles and Paul had to convince him of that fact because Paul calls himself the apostle to Gentiles and even talks about Peter, James, and John, as being sent to the circumcision. In other words, their primary mission was to Jews, right, whereas his primary mission was to Gentiles. But it's crucial to note here that the first conversions of the Gentiles take place with Peter and the conversion of Cornelius.

So Peter and Paul have the same teaching on the salvation of the Gentiles, this is just the apostolic testimony; it goes all the way back to the great commission, right. Jesus tells the apostles go into all nations teaching them everything I've commanded you, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in Matthew 28. But it took this miracle of the falling of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius to really kickstart the Gentile mission proper, to show that it was time for the

Gentiles to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit and the sacrament of baptism, which leads to what I was saying about the sacraments. There's a lot of debate these days about exactly what order should the sacraments go in. You know some people say it should be Baptism and then Eucharist and then Confirmation. Other people say it should be bBaptism, then Confirmation, then Eucharist. And I like to point out to my students, it's important to remember that God himself here flips the order because the Catechism teaches that in confirmation we receive the grace that the apostles received at Pentecost, right, that's what we receive in the sacrament of confirmation. But in this case Cornelius and the Gentiles receive the grace of confirmation before they receive the sacrament of baptism. So it's important to just remember that in terms of the sacramental economy, God can do these extraordinary things and he can give certain graces to people in order to carry out a specific mission or specific task, in this case the revelation of the conversion of the Gentiles.

I'll close here with one last point from the Catechism, because this statement from St. Peter that anyone who does right in any nation is acceptable to God is something that can be taken out of context and can be taken in a direction of a kind of relativism or kind of universalism which says that all religions are created equal, and you know as long as people seek after God it doesn't really matter whether you belong to the church or whether you belong to some other pagan religion or whatever it might be. I would just stress here that we need to make sure we understand Peter's words within the living tradition of the church. The church has never taken Peter's words to mean that all religions are created equal or it doesn't really matter what religion you belong to, as long as you're a good person you can be saved. That's not what Peter says here. What the church's position on this teaching is, is very nuanced, but is really crucial for us to hear it. So I'd like to quote again from the Catechism. As we saw in a previous video, the church makes very clear that all salvation comes through Christ and through Christ alone, right. However at the same time the church qualifies that statement with the following teaching:

“Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal

salvation.” “Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men.”²

And there the Catechism is quoting from *Lumen Gentium* 16 and *Ad Gentes* 7. Those are two documents of the Second Vatican Council which actually address this whole question of salvation outside the church. And so what do we make of that? Well I would suggest to you that when you read these verses, you might think of Cornelius as an example of the kind of righteous Gentile that the Catechism and Vatican II were describing here. It's describing a category of person, of which there presumably have been very many in history the world, who through no fault of their own have never heard about the gospel of Christ. That's the situation Cornelius was in before he encountered Peter. He was a righteous pagan, he feared God, he gave alms, but he had not yet heard the good news of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. And so when he prayed to God, Acts tells us that his prayers and his alms ascended before him, that God could hear his prayer, that God was not bound by his own covenant, right, to bring grace and salvation to this man who through no fault of his own had not encountered Christ.

So what does Cornelius do? Moved by grace he tries in his actions to do God's will as he knows it through the dictates of his conscience, right. Which by the way was limited at that point. We even see that he's not completely free from error when he encounters Peter because what does he try to do? He tries to worship Pete, because he doesn't quite understand yet the fullness of the truth. And yet the church is saying to us that in those cases there is a real possibility for those people to be saved. However, we don't know how it happens, right. The Catechism says that in ways known to God himself but not known to us those who do this, who sincerely follow their conscience, who seek God with a sincere heart, who are moved by grace, they can be saved but we don't know how it happens, right. Therefore the sacred obligation to evangelize, to share the gospel, to bring the sacraments to the nations, still remains and that is the church's primary mission. And again we see that enacted in Acts 10. Notice, what does Peter not do? He doesn't say to Cornelius, oh well

² *Lumen Gentium* 16; *Ad Gentes* 7; cf. CCC 847-48

you're a righteous pagan and you're obviously a God-fearing man and you give alms, so I'm just going to let you stay just the way you are. No, what does he do? He says can anyone object to this man being baptized, because he wants to bring him into the fullness of life in Christ, because Christ didn't just die so that we cannot go to hell, right. Salvation isn't just about not going to hell, it's about being united with him through the sacraments, through his word, through the Scriptures, through the life of the church. Christ died so that Cornelius, and every other righteous pagan, could have those graces, could have those gifts, could have the fullness of grace that only the church can offer. And so this beautiful teaching we find in Acts 10 about how God shows no partiality toward the people of the world is not an excuse not to evangelize, it's actually a reason to evangelize. The love of Christ compels us to bring the good news not just to the Jews, not just to the chosen people, but to every single human being who has ever lived in this world. And that's really what Acts is all about and that's what Acts 10 is about. It's about the beginning of the spread of the gospel through every nation in the world.