

**Sunday, May 13, 2012 – Sixth Week of Easter**  
***Prepared by Fr. John McAuley, MM, Taipei, Taiwan***

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; Psalms 98:1, 2-3, 3-4; 1 John 4:7-10; John 15:9-17

I recently received a “living gift.” A good friend of mine had a tree planted in my name. My friend is from a culture in which the presentation of the gift is as important as the gift itself, so she first “clothed” the gift-notification certificate in a plain white envelope. The envelope was then inserted into a heavy-gauge, lined, highly filigreed gift envelope. That envelope was in turn placed into a high-gloss paper gift bag, reinforced by cardboard struts to keep the bag’s shape, and filled with tissue paper to nest the gift envelope. Ultimately, the gift of a tree planting, intended as a contribution to a reforestation project, was announced by a paper certificate, placed inside two paper envelopes, wrapped in three pieces of tissue paper, and housed in a cardboard and glossed paper bag! What portion of that tree’s wood might be used simply to verify that it had been planted?

The readings of this sixth Sunday of Easter give us insight into what we quickly intuit as an incongruity between the intent of the gift given me, and the nullification of that intention by a well meaning, but unreflective, culturally conditioned behavior.

Jesus, Paul and Peter today all speak of Love, but of a particular kind. They speak of a Love that bears fruit; bearing fruit, the hallmark of a Love that is Divine in origin, in intent and in effect. A Love that bears fruit is not exhausted in a single act or even multiple acts of expression. Instead, it grows when expressed. Nor is its expression and effect limited to a single object, even when it is focused on a particular object. Love that bears fruit is a transcending grace that benefits a wider web of life and engenders new life.

All three readings testify that a Love that bears fruit is rooted and flourishes in right relationships.

Jesus tells us, if anyone wishes to Love truly, with a Love that bears fruit, then they should look to him and his Father, to their relationship. Jesus tells us, if anyone wishes to Love truly, with a Love that bears fruit, then look to his relationship with us. The way we know how to love one another is through right relationships; loving within a context that reflects an awareness that there is more than simply a me and a you, and that expresses itself in ways that contribute to a wider well being of peoples and the world through you and me.

Peter came to understand the deeper, true, rightly ordered relationship with non-Jewish believers. The ensuing mutual acceptance among them quickly engendered a Love that transcended their immediate situation and released the power and the fruits of the Holy Spirit anew in the world.

The gift given me was thoughtful and well intended. But that did not suffice. The overly elaborate packaging contributed, perhaps minutely, but nonetheless directly, to further damage the very environment that the gift wished to support. The disordered relationship between the intent of the gift and its manner of expression diminished that particular act of Love from bearing the full fruit that it was capable of producing. This expression of Love did not achieve its potential transcendence. While it touched me deeply and cemented the relationship

between my friend and me, any benefit to others was neutralized by contributing to damaging effects on the environment, and hence on us all.

This understanding of Love might also provide insight from a faith perspective on the root causes and a possible trajectory our current financial, social and environmental crises. Even where our intentions were good and our motivations pure, our systems for obtaining resources for our society and the structures of producing wealth for our citizens nullified our intent. Like the presentation of my gift, the mechanisms chosen to pursue those goals are structured to operate contrary to our moral intent. While our activities have produced benefits, the benefits were largely for the few. It is now plain to us that overall our social and physical environments have not benefited, and worse, our actions have seriously weakened the integrity of our social fabric and of the environment. Life has not been sustained and regenerated by our cornerstone economic, social and security policies and our solicitation of natural resources. To the contrary, by their implementation life has often been made more vulnerable to debilitating damage and irreversible destruction. As a result, collectively as a society, the everyday avenues of our being able to experience the generative and profoundly transcendent effects of Love in the world such as those experienced by Jesus in his Love with the Creator have become fewer and narrower, and as a consequence that Love increasingly becomes abstract and alien to us. Further, this diminished social context provides fewer opportunities for us to individually experience Jesus' transcendent Love for us in our lives. And finally, diminished as a society and as individuals, it becomes ever more difficult for us to effectively give and receive even rudimentary expressions of Love between one another.

The cumulative, cyclic effect of all these factors becomes unsustainable. In scriptural history, this is just the very environment the Spirit has been known to repeatedly step into, to stir the pot, and to create anew. We very well may be invited through the present global crises to join Her in birthing a new Genesis for our world.

*Climate change makes us all aware of the limits of our planet's natural resources and challenges us to examine our lifestyles – "to live more simply so that others might simply live." Visit the [Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns](http://www.maryknollogc.org) website where over the course of the year, we will post resources and reflections to help individuals and communities learn more about the connections between care of Earth and all its life forms, the global economy and our faith.*

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