

Homily: 7th Sunday of Easter: 2016: Cycle C: Acts 7:55-60; Ps. 97; Rev 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20; Jn 17: 20-26

“The Beautiful Fruits of Divine Love flowing from Forgiveness of the Heart”

1. We are called by God to share in His gifts of peace, unity, and harmony in our families, in the Church, and in our individual relationships. Do we realize that fully? It all flows from what Jesus says today in the Gospel that *we are called to oneness in Him, so that the world may believe that the Father sent Him.* What a powerful witness to the truth of the Catholic Faith it is when people witness a sense of peace and unity and harmony in us; which by the way, is not natural to human beings outside of God’s grace. On our own we tend to fight, to bicker, to hold grudges, to take revenge, and to build ourselves up at other people’s expense, which is why there is conflict and disharmony in the world. The Lord’s way of love is different than that: it is self-giving love expressed in forgiveness from the heart, not sweating the small stuff in life, and even when facing the big inevitable conflicts with others at times - dealing with them in God’s truth and love. For example, how do you react to someone slandering your good name and accusing you of various evil deeds that never occurred, or who simply misunderstood your good intentions? We all face this sad but real dynamic at times in our lives. The initial reaction in our hearts and minds is to be hurt and get angry, but over time how do we deal with this? Do we let it fester and think I am NEVER going to talk to that person (s) again, or deal with them in any way; or even worst think to yourself: I will take my revenge in due time?! **That can’t be the way we deal with things if we claim to be disciples of Jesus.** Witness today the example of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr: did he lash out at his persecutors? NO. Instead he fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, “*Lord, do not hold this sin against them.*” Even if we can’t have a friendly relationship with certain people because of conflict and hurt or simple clash of personalities or differences of opinion on essential or trivial matters, we can at least pray for them and entrust them to God. Do we do that for the people we don’t care for in this earthly life?

2. The gifts of peace, harmony and unity: the oneness Jesus talks about today in the Gospel, flows ultimately from the spirit of **forgiveness, which Jesus won for us on the Cross**, and which to be authentic must be both from our hearts and in our actual interaction with others, especially with those who have hurt us deeply. Sometimes we have to work on one at a time: to will to be forgiving even when the feelings of forgiveness are not there, which eventually, in God's grace, will lead to true interior forgiveness in the heart which is the harder and deeper dimension of true forgiveness. Does this mean we are **a hypocrite** – just pretending to forgive; if we try to be forgiving, but don't feel it in our hearts? Not necessarily: it takes time to be healed from deep hurt and misunderstanding. All God asks if for us to make the effort. But for this to occur we must make every effort to get rid of grudges and to allow previous hurts and misunderstandings to be healed by the Holy Spirit. To entrust all to the merciful Heart of Jesus and the eternal embrace of our loving Heavenly Father. This is far from easy on a human level, but **SO SPIRITUALLY LIBERATING!** It has to be: for personal betrayals may hurt more deeply than any other sin; they can be objectively grievous sins, (even if not always subjectively because of human weakness of will and lack of reflection) against love, whether deliberate or based on misunderstanding of motives and actions. That is also why Jesus tells us elsewhere *to be merciful as our Heavenly Father is merciful*, to give others the benefit of the doubt, and always point people to God's love and truth. Let's be honest though, to do this is **a real struggle** in actual life. It is where the rubber hits the proverbial road in regards to Christian discipleship. And if we don't allow the Holy Spirit to bring this dynamic of forgiveness about, then this hurt as much as anything in life can **paralyze** us spiritually. It is tragic and frightening to see people who are spiritually stunted, paralyzed and embittered at a deep level of their being. **How they need prayer and acts of penance and reparation by others in the Mystical Body of Christ to get them out of that pit of deep spiritual darkness!** It really is a glimpse of **Hell: the place** of unforgiveness, grudges, hatred, misunderstanding, and bitterness on all levels. Scary!

3. All the beautiful fruits of love: self-giving, forgiveness, harmony, peace, joy, unity and oneness flow ultimately from our connection to the Trinity of Love: God Himself. The key to all this is **cultivating a deep life of prayer** with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and **being willing to unite the sufferings** of misunderstanding, hurt, and slander with Jesus, in company with Our Blessed Mother, with St. Stephen with all the saints, including a certain guy named **Saul** - who the “stoners” today in the first reading are laying down their cloaks by, as they do their evil deed. Do you realize this is the same Saul who, after being knocked off his horse, became Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, and eventually was molded by the Holy Spirit through much suffering into St. Paul? WOW! **The seeds of Saul’s conversion began today** as St. Stephen forgave him and the others who were stoning him to death. **Are we willing to forgive those who hurt and slander and stone us, if not literally, at least emotionally and spiritually, in the same way?** This is one of the tests of holiness and a key evangelization tool to lead others to God and the Catholic Faith, that maybe we never thought of. **Forgiveness makes the demons shutter; it is Godly in all ways, the demons on the other hand NEVER forgive.** **Who do we want to be like?!** When hurt by others deeply, instead of holding a grudge, may we imitate **Jesus** on the Cross in saying, “*Father forgive them they know not what they do*”; and **St. Stephen** today, “*Lord, do not hold this sin against them.*” And when we hurt others deeply and become aware of it, may we have the humility and courage, in Christ, to say, “*I’m sorry, please forgive me.*” Is there someone we need to forgive today? Or maybe we need to ask someone to forgive us. **Do it, in God!** Then we will be living the prayer of Jesus to the Father today in the Gospel, “*that they may be one, Father, as we are one, I in them and you (Father) in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that You sent me, and that you love them even as you loved me, ..., and that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them.*” This is glimpse of **Heaven** as we hear about in the 2nd reading today from the Book of Revelation which concludes with: *Amen! Come Lord Jesus.* God bless you.