

HOMILY

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2009

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

A moving truck loaded with furniture was parked in front of a southern California home. A husband and wife were sweeping out the garage when a woman from a house across the street approached with an apple pie.

“Welcome to the neighborhood,” she said, “I baked it myself and I want you to have it.

“Really, we can’t,” the husband replied.

“Of course, you can,” she ran on. “When I moved in two years ago, no one welcomed me and I want you to feel at home.”

She thrust the pie into the husband’s hands. With an embarrassed laugh he protested, “We’ve actually been here four years and we’re moving away.”

The woman stared at him, dumbfounded, her mouth open. Shrugging her shoulders, she said, “Enjoy it anyway!”

That could happen in a lot of neighborhoods. It could happen in a lot of churches. The biggest barrier to people welcoming strangers to their church is that they are afraid they will welcome someone who has been coming to church longer than they have. Somewhere along the way in our crowded, impersonal world, we have lost a sense of community, a sense of neighborliness.

Father Eugene Kennedy, from Loyola University, lists several reasons why he feels Americans are finding it difficult to form friendships. He attributes it to the high mobility of families, the rapidly changing social conditions, and an obsession with the superficial things of life. However, Father Kennedy says that the primary cause of a friendless society is the emphasis society puts on self. He states that most Americans are unwilling to make the effort or the sacrifices necessary in forming close and lifelong relationships.

I fear Father Kennedy is so right. In fact, let me ask you a most important question: How many close friends do you have? Are there people you could turn to in a time of need and know that they would be there for you?

There's no question that we need friends. We especially need friends when life is unkind to us. Someone once defined a friend as the first person who comes in when the whole world has gone out.

The reason I speak about friends and friendship is because Jesus says to his disciples, "*I no longer call you slaves because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends because I have told you everything I have heard from my father.*" Jesus calls us friends!

How do we know that Jesus is our friend? No one has greater love than this—to lay down one's life for one's friends. He laid down his life for us. We can see it in the sacrifice he made for you and me. Christ loves us so much that he made the ultimate investment in us. He lay down his life on our behalf.

This gift of Jesus' great and tremendous love challenges those of us who call ourselves friends of Jesus. While relatively few of us will be called to actually lay down our lives or to die a martyr's death for the sake of our faith, we are still called to lay down something of ourselves for Jesus, for love's sake.

What is there in my words or in my work? What is there in my thoughts or in my attitude that I should lay down in order that I might offer a response to the love that has been lavished on me in Jesus?

A missionary to India by the name of Amy Carmichael described the laying down quality of love to which believers are called as *Calvary Love*. She proposes that

‡ If I belittle those whom I am called to serve, pointing out their weak points in contrast with what I think as my virtues, *then I know nothing of Calvary Love.*

‡ If I slam or lambaste another human being, *then I know nothing of Calvary Love.*

- ‡ If I am afraid to speak the truth, *then I know nothing of **Calvary Love**.*
- ‡ If I think only in terms of my work, my preferences, my opinions, if the burdens of others are not mine too and their joys mine, *then I know nothing of **Calvary Love**.*
- ‡ If I wonder why I must struggle and suffer at times, if I press God that all such things be removed from my life, if I cannot be trusted to endure any disappointment, *then I know nothing of **Calvary Love**.*
- ‡ If I allow injustice to be perpetrated or the poor and vulnerable to be mistreated and say nothing, *then I know nothing of **Calvary Love**.*

Calvary Love—the no-greater-love that is willing to lay down the self in the service of others. This is the love we have known in Jesus. This is the love to which each of us must aspire.

