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21 SUNDAY

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of EASTER

Acts 10: 25-26, 34-35, 44-48

Ps 97: 1-4

1 John 4: 7-10

John 15: 9 - 17

Pope Benedict's first encyclical letter took its theme from this Sunday's letter and gospel of St John. It's about love, God's love and our love for God. That word "love" has become so overworked and overused in modern-day life, in songs and fashion and entertainment. Pope Benedict was trying to "rescue" its deep meaning, and re-focus love as the centre of Christianity. He seems to have encouraged people towards a fresh appreciation of what love means. Today the words of St John again invite us to reflective prayer on the Christian meaning of love. Love has various forms and meanings, and many different definitions and descriptions. But what Jesus and St John talked about was not theory but the very practical matter of how a Christian should live. Jesus' words link love with the observance of God's commandments, with faithfulness to Jesus, with intimacy and friendship with Him, with joy, with selfless service to others, with the mission every Christian receives to "go out and bear fruit". So, why do Christians so often look upon the commandments as burdens? Why so often fearful, more afraid of God than really intimate with Jesus? Embarrassed or afraid, it sometimes seems, to be a close friend of Jesus, claiming we're unworthy or not important or something like that --- of course we're unworthy! But that's the whole mystery and joy, that God nevertheless loves and continues to love us. When we're truly and humbly aware of our unworthiness and sinfulness, and of God's continuing love, care and forgiveness, then we will be grateful and loving, and joyfully want to share God's greatest gift with others.

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