

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Cycle B
Acts of the Apostles 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48
Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4
1 John 4:7-10
John 15:9-17
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If you've been following these Scripture reflections for any length of time, you've no doubt noticed that G. K. Chesterton (1876-1936) is one of my favorite authors. The early twentieth century English "man of letters" wrote across a range of literary genres. Though he always called himself a journalist, he also wrote essays, poetry, novels and biographies. It is to his work as a biographer that I would like to refer today. Chesterton's biographies were widely admired in his day. He was credited with deep, startling insights into the lives and works of the people he wrote about. For example, leading Thomists of his time were awed by his life of Thomas Aquinas, one calling it the book he had been trying to write all his life. His biographies of St. Francis of Assisi, Charles Dickens, Robert Browning and George Bernard Shaw were all widely read and critically lauded. If you were to sit down with all of these volumes and copy out Chesterton's most striking remarks about each of these figures, the resulting list of quotations, valuable in their own right, would have an additional surprising quality. Read out, with the proper names omitted, they would serve admirably as a description of G. K. Chesterton himself. It's as if Chesterton could ultimately find in others only those qualities that he himself possessed, leading me to wonder if it might be the same with all of us. Perhaps our deepest intuitive insights into the virtues of others are evidence that we possess those same virtues ourselves. (I'm reminded of

Augustine's remark that to praise the virtuous acts of another is to have a share in them.)

Many have suspected that the converse is true: that the behaviors and frailties that most annoy us in other people are the very ones that we dislike in ourselves. It is proverbial, for instance, that one should be slow to trust someone who insists that no one can be trusted. The idea, I suppose, is that they are basing their low opinion of the trustworthiness of others on their estimation of their own character. So, if you are looking for someone to trust, you might be wise to choose someone who is trusting. But wouldn't it be wonderful if the same held true of the positive qualities we perceive in others - that our deepest insights into what is beautiful in other people are evidence that the same beauty dwells somewhere in us?

These thoughts are spurred by our Second Reading from the First letter of John:

Beloved, let us love one another,
because love is of God;
everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.
Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.

The idea is that we are able to love God only because God, who *is* love, is already there in us. Jesus makes much the same point in our Gospel:

As the Father loves me, so I also love you.
Remain in my love.

The theologian, Karl Rahner (1904-1984), insisted that human self-consciousness first flickers into being when an infant sees the love reflected in its mother's eyes. What a comfort and inspiration it can be to realize that our subsequent love of our mothers, and of one another, and of God is evidence that the God who *is* love, the infinite love that creates and sustains the universe, dwells already in us. Perhaps it is to this that Jesus refers when he says, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete."