

**PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES**  
**SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR B**

**Second Reading 1 John 4: 7–10**

Today we are reading part of the great ‘love’ chapter of this Epistle. The author keeps returning to the same themes but with new insights. Here God’s very identity is defined by love. The word ‘love’ appears in different forms nine times in these verses: ‘the basic model is the prior love of God, to which we subsequently respond’ (Nicholas King SJ).

The main Scriptural source on which the audience of this Epistle relies is St John’s Gospel, so the author is at pains to make sure they have a correct understanding of it.

For example, the similarities and parallels are clear between John 3: 16:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life*

and 1 John 4: 9–10:

*God sent into the world his only Son so that we could have life through him; this is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God’s love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away.*

Two examples of God’s love for us are given here: God sent his Son to die for us, and he did this to take our sins away.

Love is an aspect of the divine in which we can share, and it is manifest in our love for other Christians.



**Gospel John 15: 9–17**

Today we continue with Jesus’s farewell discourse, said to be patterned on that of Moses in Deuteronomy. Both Moses and Jesus look to the future rather than the past as they say farewell. Moses stresses the importance of keeping the commandments while Jesus speaks of a new and unique commandment, to love one another as we have been loved by him.

**‘Remain in my love’**

These verses follow on from last Sunday’s text and take us further into the longest monologue in the fourth Gospel (chapters 15–16), developing the theme of the vine, and what it means to ‘abide’ or ‘remain’ in Jesus. For some this may be a mystical experience, but for most it can simply mean staying close to Jesus, keeping constant contact with him and taking time to be alone with him. As ‘remain’ is an essential word in vv. 1–8, ‘love’ is an essential word in vv. 9–17.

**‘You are my friends’**

There was a custom practised at the courts of the Roman Emperors and of Kings in the Middle East, where a very select group were called the ‘friends of the king’ or ‘friends of the emperor’.

They had access to the king at all times, even to his bedchamber early in the day. He talked to them before he talked to his generals, his rulers and his statesmen, and they had a close and intimate relationship with him. This is the relationship Jesus offers his disciples and us.

**‘I shall not call you servants any more’**

These words would have had a more significant meaning to those hearing them in Jesus’s time, than to us today. *Doulos*, the slave, the servant of God, was not a title of shame: it was a title of the highest honour. Moses was the *doulos* of God (Deuteronomy 34: 5), as were Joshua (Joshua 24: 29) and David (Psalm 89: 20).

**‘You did not choose me, no, I chose you’**

This phrase is key to the passage. Jesus tells his disciples that the initiative came from him. He loved them first, ‘laying down his life’ for them, setting a perfect example of love. He called them to an intimate partnership with him.

**‘The Father will give you anything you ask him in my name’**

Having elevated them to ‘friends’, Jesus sends his disciples out as his ambassadors, with a reminder of the fruit-bearing vine. The success of their mission depends on their relationship of love with one another, and with Jesus.