The fact is God takes the first step toward us and not the other way around.  As Jesus says, “it is I who has elected you.”  We shall see, I hope, how Jesus chose Peter and the other apostles and explained to them the meaning of love.  The apostle John writes that we are to love another because love comes from God.  John repeats the sentiment of Jesus saying, “love does not consist in that we have loved God, but that God loves us first and sent his son to die for us.”

I believe that Peter understood that message by his humility to Cornelius, a Roman official.  Peter told Cornelius to treat him like any other man, no less and no more deserving of respect.  Then Peter improvised.  I mean that Peter handled a situation foreign to him with grace.  In the process Peter set into motion a new practice.  I do not want us to overlook how Peter responded given the challenge he faced.

  These pagans like Cornelius were considered unbelievers, lost, not connected in any way with the chosen people.  Then the Holy Spirit performed a miracle in front of the eyes of the apostles and fellow Jews.  While Peter is speaking to Cornelius the Holy Spirit descended upon the pagan official and his family.  They responded in such a way that it was clear these pagans understood the Gospel.  Peter ordered then and there that these new believers be baptized.  Of course, this broke the barrier setting apart the chosen people, that is the Jews like Peter from the Pagans.

From now on, the difference would not be Jew or Pagan but whether one believed in Jesus as the Son of God who has entered the world to free us sinners from death.  Peter opened the doors of the Faith far beyond his own knowledge limited to the Jews he had known in Galilee.  Now all men and women were eligible.

This gave the demand to love from Jesus some substance.  What does love mean?  Is it a vague feeling or does love make us examine our lives?  Jesus had taught the apostles well that love was more than a feeling.  Jesus described his willingness to die as a demonstration of love.  Jesus gave the apostles a new definition of the chosen people.  We are chosen not because we are Israelites who speak Hebrew.  We are chosen when we confess Jesus as Lord and savior.  We are not a people of the same blood, same roots or same language.  We are one when God loves us.

Love in God’s eyes is shown by the sacrifice and death of Jesus.  We love others when we are willing to make sacrifices.  For me yesterday was a chance to practice what I preach.  It was a busy, long day.  Still, I made time to drive downtown to join a group of people from Columbia who were gathered.  Did you know that at least thirty people have died in Columbia in recent days?  There is a conflict with the government.  People are protesting and then dying in the streets.  I met with the group to say a prayer and tell them that God is a God of justice and right.  Protest peacefully with my blessing, I said.  I am so proud of the young woman organizing it, Carolina.  She called me Thursday to say she wanted a priest to say a prayer.  I said yes knowing that I did not have the time.  With God’s help I made time yesterday and a nice crowd came, and we prayed.  Then they marched.   This is love what Carolina did – one young woman who gathered fifty people.  That is impressive.  Let us remember that love is more than reciting prayers in church.  It means fighting for peace and justice in our world.