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Sixth Sunday of Easter

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In our world today there are many things that we let divide us from each other. Unfortunately every day I hear something new that someone uses as a reason to not come together in community with another person. As I read this Sunday's readings, all I could think about was how these readings call us to look passed differences and come together. And it's a simple message, yet seems to be the one that is hardest in our world to hear.

Bro. Joe Barrish, S.M.

For instance, in the first reading the questions comes up if circumcision is necessary for salvation and ultimately to join the Christian community. When this is posed to the apostles and elders they have a very simple answer when they say, "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden." That phrase "burden" is important. It implies something that weighs us down, impedes us, holds us back. Their feeling was that the love of God should not be something that causes us pain or discomfort or uneasiness and should come willingly and freely. By placing restraints on who can be received in God's grace then it is not coming free of judgement and willingly.

But today, I feel we place burdens upon ourselves but also others when it comes being a good Christian and member of this global community. God does not want those "burdens" in our lives so we need to seek to eliminate them from our lives and others. So why do we pass judgement on others whose lives are not like our own? Why do we build walls between people when a helping hand is the only thing keeping us from a new community member? Why do we let all the various labels placed on people define who gets to receive God's grace?

I am a teacher and coach and in my job I interact with so many students from every background imaginable. And more often than not those students can come together time and time again as friends, teammates and classmates. Where the student comes from often doesn't matter. But then I look at the news, social media, or other larger events and all I see is talk about the things that divide us. About the burdens we place on other groups to belong. It makes me wonder what happens between the carefree time as a student where everyone is a potential friend and adulthood. Why can't we just look passed our preconceived bias towards someone, recognize that we may be different than them in some way, and then embrace them nonetheless.

This is echoed in the Gospel when Jesus says "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him." Yes, it is that simple! If you show love to others as Jesus instructs us time and time again then God will send his love to us.