

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter April 24, 2016**

Acts 14:21b-27; Revelation 21:1-5a; John 13:31-33a, 34-35

During the Easter season the liturgy brings us closer to the resurrected Jesus and makes us realize that we are always united to him and he is united to us. He gives the invitation to all of us to enter into the true discipleship but in the context of the community. On his mission he sends his disciples two by two and teaches them to proclaim his kingdom as a community. He tells his chosen ones that where two or three gather in his name he is present in their midst. He takes the initiative to unite himself to us. Our life receives full meaning when we are able to give ourselves to the service of others and find meaning in that service. Our true living comes by opening ourselves to God and to the world by becoming persons open to do his will. The theme that dominates the readings of today is love and service. Jesus told his disciples to love one another as he himself had loved them. He showed the type of love they ought to have: he served them and washed their feet during the final meal. During the Last Supper he told them that there is no greater love than one giving his life for his friends and he gave his life for all, calling them his friends. He also defined for us the meaning of God's love which is sacrificing and self-emptying love. God emptied himself and gave his only son for our sake that we may have life in him.

The First Reading taken from the Acts of the Apostles tells us about the early missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas. They went through all hardships and misunderstandings while communicating the message and vision of Jesus to all. At the same time to those who were already Christians they gave support and encouragement to persevere in their Christian convictions. Luke tells us of the praiseworthy service of love that the Christians had for each other in the name of Jesus. Paul and Barnabas continued in their mission as they went from town to town, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to continue in the faith. The Apostles instructed the new community with the words of consolation that through many persecutions they must enter the kingdom of God. Having already experienced sufferings and rejection the Apostles told the Christians that suffering is part and parcel of their lives. On their return they explained to them to shine in a service of love in the Lord Jesus and to imitate the saints of the Church. They then appointed elders as leaders to direct the believers in each church community. With prayer and fasting, they entrusted

themselves to the Lord in whom they had come to believe. The apostles then called the church together and related that entire things God had done for them and how he had opened the door of faith for the Gentiles.

The Second Reading from the Book of Revelation helps us to understand the purpose of the progressive development of the spiritual wonders of God within the Church. John sees the holy city of Jerusalem coming down from heaven. Here he has a vision of new heaven and new earth. In his vision John sees the picture of the end time, indicated in this newness. It is the glorious arrival of the long awaited "salvation and the power and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of His Messiah." God the Father began to accomplish this in Christ's death and resurrection. The imagery presented is one of the brides which are the Church. The presence of the bride groom, Jesus himself is a sign of joy. Hence in that context every tear will be wiped away and all sadness removed. All evil, all pain, worry and anxiety will come to an end. Joy will pervade the whole universe. God promises that he will make all things new in Jesus and all the old will be taken away. The glorified life is eternal. The reading says, "The home of God is among mortals." John uses the image of New Jerusalem, which in turn becomes the bride of the Lamb. Once we have passed on from this life and we have entered the Heavenly Kingdom of God, we will have become immortals. God himself will join people through Jesus.

The Gospel of last week spoke of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and the need of hearing His voice and following Him. Today's Gospel in the next step towards our spiritual growth as we are called to reflect on our service of love in the Lord Jesus. The passage begins with the emphasising words of Jesus: "Now the Son of Man is glorified." The designation of "now" is important because it signifies that the hour Jesus has been referring to throughout the first half of the Gospel has arrived. Past present and the future are redefined in the light of the arrival of the hour. The word "Son of man" refers to Jesus as he is deliberately moving towards his final end which is the crucifixion. The word "glorify" is used five times in the first two lines. It leads us strongly to understand the glorification that will take place in Jesus in his revelation and the saving act. God is revealed to us in Jesus. Jesus will be revealed fully by God in the crucifixion. The Father and the Son mutually reveal one another. In this way God reveals himself and Jesus to each one of us believer and makes us understand the real personality of God. We are given the picture of a loving and serving God.

The theme of departure and return are important for the Gospel. Departing is not a negative move on the part of Jesus. He has prepared his disciples for this moment and it will be the fulfilment of his mission. Jesus must return to his Father but the disciples must stay and continue the work Jesus has given them. The way they are to continue the work of Jesus during his absence is by observing the new commandment he has given them. The command is that they must love one another. The criterion for this love is the way Jesus has loved them. He is the example for his followers and they ought to imitate him all the time. Part of the purpose of his washing of the feet was to demonstrate to the disciples the extent of his love for them. First of all he loves them as an equal and secondly this love is demonstrated in service. The ultimate service will be his total self-giving on the cross. In other words, as God has loved Jesus, and as Jesus has loved his disciples, so the disciples are to love one another. By their mutual love, the disciples will share in this divine mutuality of the Son and the father. This commandment is the key for the disciples carrying on the work of Jesus after he departs from the world and returns to his Father.

To this Jesus adds, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." A disciple is one who is learning or has learnt from a master or teacher, or one who follows the teachings prescribed by a master or teacher. Sacred Scripture records that the disciples followed Jesus during his public ministry and received instruction from Him regarding the Good News of salvation and the fullness of revelation. The disciples spent three intense years with Jesus being formed by their divine master. Now by shining in love towards one another, all will come to know that we Christians are the disciples of Jesus. These Words of Jesus remind us of the First Letter of John: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." Again John says "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." He reminds the disciples that all those who say, 'I love God,' and hates their brothers or sisters are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they can see cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from Jesus is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

The season of Easter reminds us of the Resurrection of Jesus. It is the celebration of new life which has come to us through our Risen Lord. Resurrection is the sign of God's love for humanity when he gives his Son again with greater love. John has clearly given us the teaching that God loved the world and sent his son to save us which is his gratuitous love. But man rejected the God-Man and killed him. But God raised him up and gave him back to us out of greater love. That is the Resurrection. It is the extension of the love of God. Love is to wish each other well. If our love runs deep it includes affection and service as is explained in the gospel of today. Love is the union of minds and hearts and wills. Love is compassion, support, healing, missionary and serviceable. Today's psalm tells us that love is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and rich in abounding mercy. Above all God's love is kindness, compassionate, sacrificing and reaches out to all. Resurrection is this love of God shown to us in Jesus.

In the Gospel Jesus says that the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. Glorification can refer to either the giving of praise or the manifestation of that which is worthy of praise. When Jesus says now he is referring to the manifestation of God now taking place rather than the praise it will bring forth in the future. The cross is itself the revelation of divine glory and the way for Jesus to share the divine life with his followers. He calls his disciples, little children indicating how he is attached to them in love. Let us ask the grace that we too may be close to Jesus throughout love dedication and service. For us, this newness of the Resurrection of Jesus is just like that which Christ experienced. If Jesus is - body and soul - in the Father, alive in the Love of the Holy Spirit, then we too, who are the members of his Body and who should be other "christs", are called to a new life in then Holy Spirit: that of the mutual love of brothers and sisters who share but a single heart, a single soul. The new commandment is that one should live no longer in himself and for himself, but rather in that other person who is our brother or sister, and for him or her.

Today Jesus calls us to a love like his, a love of service. He calls us to love like our heavenly Father who is benevolent and who shows no partiality. He calls us to love as he loved, meaning to be filled with love for one another. The disciple of Christ is not primarily an individual person but an inter-person. He is always at the service of the other. Hence Jesus gives us the new commandment to love other people he has loved us. The divine command is to love God with our whole heart and soul and so on; and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Jesus has added a new element in

telling us that the true test of discipleship is to love other people in the same way that he has loved us. His love was the sacrificial love where he gave his life for us. The disciples are now called upon to build the faith of others and we see how marvellous the living faith of the early Church was.

Generally the word love is used by us mainly in contexts which imply deep affection, emotional attraction and a good feeling when the beloved is around or even just thought of. That is not quite the meaning of the word in this context. In the present context, which is the time after the washing of the feet of the disciples, the word love implies a reaching out to others in a caring attitude for their well being, irrespective of whether there will be a similar response by the other. It is the compassion that Jesus shows for the sinner and the evil person. He even washed the feet of Judas. It is why the true Christian disciple does not in fact have enemies. This is what Jesus is doing in praying for forgiveness for those who were nailing him to the cross. He loves them not as close friends obviously, but as people who truly needed enlightenment about what they were doing not just to him but to themselves. Jesus cared for each and every person. Jesus' attention here in the farewell discourse, as well as John's attention in his epistles, is on the crucial stage of promoting the love between disciples. The community is to continue to manifest God as Jesus has done, thereby shining as a light in the world.

We are the disciples of Jesus and his true followers. But to fulfil this call we certainly have to pass through real tests as Jesus did to his apostles. The word that Jesus uses is love or charity. This involves loving a person sincerely and with ones heart and does not just remain at giving things or monetary help. It is a service of the heart which Jesus did. He who truly loves his neighbour must be concerned with those things relating to the purpose of one's life and earning his eternal salvation. The Love of Christ in the Church is received as precious gift. It also needs be demonstrated in accordance with Christ's command to love one another. Love will be the mark of the community left behind after Christ has departed. He promises the gift of the Spirit, but that is a gift of empowerment to fulfil his mission on earth. All this is based on Love. Love is the basis of Christian discipleship and the motivation of Christian action. Love makes a Christian distinct person. Above all as St Paul says Christ is Love. Thus, Christians are called to live, and to love each other, as Jesus did: "As I loved you, you also like you the ones the others." If Jesus is in the Father for a mutual love, then Jesus must also come into each one of us for a common and

universal love! Already, through Eucharistic communion, we can anticipate our ascent into Heaven! The Most Blessed Virgin Mary understood this very well: when she saw Jesus rising up into Heaven, in the Glory of God, she followed her Divine Son in spirit, she held him in her memory forever, in order to remain forever with Him.

One day, as usually, an orphan, a little girl, stood at the street corner begging for food, money or whatever she could get. Now, this girl was wearing very tattered clothes, was dirty and quite dishevelled. A well-to-do you man passed that corner without giving the girl a second look. But, when he returned to his expensive home, his happy and comfortable family, and his well-laden dinner table, his thoughts returned to the young orphan. He became very angry with God for allowing such conditions to exist. He reproached God, saying, how you can let this happen Why don't you do something to help this girl Then he heard God in the depths of his being responding by saying I did. I created you.

Once a great actor gave a wonderful performance in a large theatre, at the close of which there were rounds of applause. He was called back again and they asked: "Would you do for us the Twenty-third Psalm?" He agreed. He recited it as an actor would, perfectly, with nothing left to be desired as far as a performance was concerned. When he was finished, again there was thunderous applause. Then the actor came to the front of the stage and said that the elderly pastor sitting on the front row would repeat the Twenty-third Psalm, the Lord is my Shepherd. The elderly gentleman, of course, was frightened. Trembling, he came to the stage. Fearfully he looked out over the vast audience. Then, as though he were at home only with one, he closed his eyes against the audience, bowed his head, and talked to God, and said: "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want...." When the old man finished, there was no applause, but there was not a dry eye in that house. The actor came to the front of the stage. He, too, was wiping his eyes. And he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, it was beautiful. You see, I know the words of the Twenty-third Psalm, but this man knows the Shepherd."

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