

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter C/2010**

When I was a student in Belgium, I went to eat regularly with a couple of friends in an old restaurant that was situated outside the city of Brussels. That restaurant existed for almost one century. In spite of the change of the personnel and the structure of the building, the spirit of the founder was kept alive over the years in order to assure the continuity of the work he initiated.

The readings of this Sunday invite us to meditate on the work Our Lord Jesus started with the foundation of the early Church, how it has been continued over the years by the apostles, and what implication it has for our Church today.

The first reading describes the missionary work of St Paul and Barnabas in the gentile lands. It shows, in particular, the spirit that animated them as they were strengthening the disciples to persevere in faith and to accept the hardships for the sake of the Kingdom of God. As they were travelling all over the lands, preaching the good news of Jesus, they appointed elders in each Church through prayers and fasting, and commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith.

The main reason that motivated the evangelization of Paul and Barnabas was above all the salvation of the world in continuity with the work already initiated by our Lord Jesus. Because their evangelization was the continuity of the work of our Lord, they felt compelled to give a report to the whole Church of what they were doing and how the Lord was saving people through their hands.

What this text teaches us is, first of all, the necessity of having people who can consecrate their time and talents to the work of our Lord Jesus. Today, more than ever, we need people in various ministries, catechists, deacons, religious men and women, Eucharistic ministers, priests..., who can bring the word of the Lord to their brothers and sisters. The text teaches us also the importance of working together as one family and the people of God.

All that means for us is that the evangelization or the apostolate is the work of the Church as a group. It is not a work of isolated individuals who think they have everything to say and others have only to say "yes". As often as they could, Paul and Barnabas called the Church together and reported on their mission. By reporting, they also listened to the insights of the remaining of the Church with regard to their work. Without that spirit of reporting and listening, the work of the Lord runs the risk of being jeopardized by some individuals, while everybody else is left out of the picture.

The big principle that is at the heart of the Church and which guides the action of those who dedicate themselves to the work of evangelization is the law of love. As the Gospel relates, Jesus recommends us to love one another as he has loved us. Love is the mark of our identity as Christians. Love is our vestment as Christians. If we are wearing that habit of love, we are in the Kingdom of Jesus. If we are not wearing love as a habit, we are out of Jesus' Kingdom. That is why Jesus says, we will be recognized by others as his disciples, if we love one another.

This point is very critical and challenging. By experience we know that we often love those who love us and we reject those who are not close to us or are not like us. But Jesus is inviting us to love without any distinction of race, color of skin, language or nationality. We have to love one another beyond mere sympathy and feelings; motivated only by the example of our Lord Jesus himself.

Such a love bears the mark of witness to the world that we belong to Jesus. The world, indeed, is hungry for people who can witness to the love of Jesus, beyond the sentiments and the feelings. The world is hungry for Christians who can show to them the civilization of love.

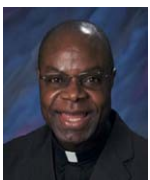
When we love as Jesus loved us, without discrimination, God is glorified in us. When we imitate Jesus by keeping the new commandment of love, we identify ourselves with him, and the Father will glorify us with Jesus. That type of love Jesus is asking of us requires new attitudes, new values and new standards of relating to God and to others in the way that we transform everything that we touch. That type of love is more than just a warm feeling toward others. It is a compassionate gift of ourselves to the spiritual and bodily needs of our fellows. It implies a reaching out to others in a caring attitude for their well-being without expecting any favor in return.

If we love in that way, then, we can transform the world and people. Then, the new heaven and new earth the book of Revelation is talking about can be built in our world today, in anticipation of the fulfillment of God's Kingdom at the end of time. But, that newness arrives only when we start to live our lives in a new way, following the example of Jesus.

The consequence to draw from of all this is, if we love in the way of Jesus, then God will dwell with us. We will be his people and he will be our God. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes so that there shall be no more death or mourning, no more wailing or pain. That is the glory to which we are called and we can obtain only by living like Jesus, totally given to God and to others.

Let us ask the Lord to help us love others in our daily lives and in the small things of life by showing tolerance, acceptance of the differences, compassion and forgiveness. Let us learn to love ourselves so that we may learn to love each other. Let us ask the Lord Jesus to bless abundantly the children who receive him today in their first communion. May all who suffer because of the love of their beloved ones find in the example of Jesus encouragement, consolation and relief! May God bless you all!

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



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