

Fifth Sunday of Easter C/2013

The readings of this fifth Sunday of Easter talk about the work of evangelization. They show that, while the love of Jesus was at the heart of the work of the apostles, it was the love of the Father that motivated Jesus in everything he did for the Church.

The first reading describes the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas in pagan lands. It shows how they were strengthening the disciples to remain faithful to the Lord in the midst of hardships endured for the sake of God's kingdom. It shows also how they established elders in every community they founded in order to continue the work they started. Though they worked independently from the other apostles, Paul and Barnabas, however, never forgot to give an account of their job to the whole Church.

What is behind this text is the idea that the growth of the Church depends on the amount of work individuals can give to it. It is only when people give their time, talent and treasure to the cause of God that his kingdom can advance on earth. Another idea is the truth that individuals are like delegates who act on behalf of the Church. They have to give an account of the work of evangelization they do to the whole Church.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the glory he receives from his Father. First of all, the Gospel relates the incident of the betrayal of Judas. Once Judas left, Jesus told his disciples that the time for him to be glorified and to glorify his Father has come. In his action, God will be glorified and in turn, God will glorify him. Then, Jesus announces to them that he will be with them only for a while. Finally, Jesus recommends his disciples to love one another as he has loved them. He assures them that if they do so, they will prove to the world that they are his disciples.

What do we learn from today's readings? The first thing I want to point out is the importance of the community of faith. In fact, we live in a culture where the individual is exalted and put at the center of every achievement. While such a vision is important in highlighting individual merits, talents and gifts, it can also turn into selfishness. In that perspective, the individual becomes not only the center of the universe, but also the community dimension of society is overlooked.

Without denying the importance of personal merits and talents, the acts of the apostles teach us that those have to be balanced with a global vision that takes into account also the dimension of community. That is what Paul and Barnabas have done. They worked so hard, using all their skills and talents in spreading the good news of Jesus and establishing churches in pagan lands, but they always came back to the apostles to give an account of their work. In this way, they have established a balance between the individual merits and the community demand.

The second point I want to highlight is about the importance of love. Love is at the heart of the Church and of our life as disciples of Jesus. When Jesus recommends us to love one another as he has loved us, he is asking us to imitate him. In that sense, love is the mark of our identity and the vestment that makes us different from others. If we wear that vestment, we have access to his Kingdom. If we are not wearing it, we are out of his Kingdom. That is why Jesus says that we will be recognized as his disciples, if we love one another.

Is it easy to love as Jesus recommends? No; because in our human nature, we want to set criteria about things we like or do not like. We also love according to the sympathy we have for someone or the feelings we have toward someone. If someone does not correspond to our criteria or does not generate good feeling or sympathy, we certainly exclude him from our circle of life.

But, when Jesus is asking us to love one another, he is asking us to do it beyond the criteria and sympathy we might have toward people. Here, Jesus himself is our only model we have to follow. By loving that way, we bear witness to the world that we belong to Jesus. I sincerely believe that the world is hungry of people who can love that way.

When we love as Jesus loved us, without discrimination and beyond criteria and sympathy, God is glorified in us. When we imitate Jesus by keeping the commandment of love, we identify ourselves with him and the Father will glorify us with Jesus. However, in order to love that way, we have to change our attitudes, our ways of living and of relating to God and to others. That type of love Jesus is asking of us is more than just a warm feeling toward others. It is a compassionate gift of ourselves to others through which we give to others what we truly are as God's sons and daughters. It is also an acceptance of the gift of creation through which we recognize in others God's children.

When we love in the way Jesus suggests, we cannot hesitate to open our hearts to the need of our fellows, because we recognize Jesus in them. If we love in that way, then, we can transform the world and the 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 such an understanding is that 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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