

Fifth Sunday of Easter C/2019

The readings of this fifth Sunday of Easter talk about the work of evangelization and its results. They show how the presence of the Risen Christ has transformed people and nations. They invite us to love one another so that, through our love, we might be recognized as disciples of Jesus.

The first reading describes the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas among the gentiles. It shows in particular how they were strengthening the disciples to remain faithful to the Lord in spite of their sufferings for the sake of God's kingdom. It shows also how they established elders in the communities they founded. Finally, it shows how Paul and Barnabas never failed 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 people can give to it. There is also the idea that those who work for the Church do it not on their own behalf, but for the benefice of the whole Church.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus recommends his disciples to love one another as he has loved them. First of all, the Gospel starts with the reminder of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. Then, it says that Jesus saw it as the time of being glorified by the Father as well as that of glorifying him. After that, the Gospel relates about Jesus' announcement that he was about to leave the world. The Gospel ends with Jesus' recommendation to the disciples that they love one another because it is only when they do so that they can be recognized as his disciples.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the commandment of love. In fact, in today's Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples that he gives them a new commandment, namely to love one another as he has loved them.

However, a question comes up: Why is Jesus calling this a new commandment? What is new that has not been said before him? In the book of Leviticus 19: 18, Moses recommends to the people of Israel what follows: "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD".

As such, the law of love was not new to the ears of the Israelites. However, in the Jewish popular imagination and understanding, the neighbor was a fellow Jew and not a stranger, given that all the strangers were considered pagans, feared and avoided by all.

In that context, the way Jesus is putting the law makes it new, because he is asking his disciples to love, not like in the past, but rather beyond preferences of race, language, tongues and nations. As he has welcomed everyone as children of God and loved them with compassion and without any distinction, so should his disciples do.

Moreover, we are used to distinguishing the Old Testament from the New one. This distinction refers to the Covenant of God with Israel at Mount Sinai and that made through the blood of Jesus on the cross. As the seal of the first Testament is the Ten Commandments, the seal of the new is the commandment of love. Nevertheless, there is no opposition between them, because at the heart of the Ten Commandments, there is the love of God and love of neighbor. That is why when the question was asked

Jesus about the greatest of the commandments, he simply said that it was the love of God and neighbor.

In that perspective, 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. Because it is about imitating him and the way he behaved toward people he met on his journey, love becomes the mark of our identity as Christians. It is 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.

It is for that reason that 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 or empathy we might have toward people. Jesus himself sets an example for us. By loving as he did, we bear witness to the world that we belong to Jesus. I sincerely believe that the world is hungry for people who can love that way. Moreover, when we love as Jesus did, three things happen: first, God is glorified in us; second, we identify ourselves with Jesus; third, 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 one another. The type of love we are talking about is more than 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.

When we love in the way Jesus suggests, we cannot hesitate to open our hearts to the needs of our fellows, because we recognize Jesus in them. Imagine how our world would be transformed if we loved one another as Jesus recommends. Then, the new heaven and new earth the book of Revelation is talking about would be built in our world today in anticipation of the fulfillment of God's Kingdom at the end of time. And in turn, God would wipe away every tear from our eyes so that there shall be no more death or mourning, no more wailing or pain.

Let us ask the Lord to help us love one another in the smallest things of daily life by showing tolerance, acceptance of the differences, compassion and forgiveness. May we love ourselves so that we come to love others! May all who suffer because of the love of their beloved ones find in the example of Jesus consolation and healing! May God bless you all!

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



Homily Date: May 19, 2019

© 2019 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20190519homily.pdf