

Fifth Sunday of Easter C2022

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 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 also shows 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 the point of 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 recalls Jesus' announcement that he was about to leave the world. The Gospel ends with Jesus' recommendation to the disciples to love one another as a sign of their recognition as being his disciples.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? It is good that I start with the context of this Jesus' speech. Today's Gospel is, indeed, part of Jesus' farewell Speech to his disciples, which took place at the Last Supper before being put to death.

First of all, in this short narrative, Jesus uses the verb "glorify" five times. What glory is he talking about? It is about the glory he will receive by the act of his death on the cross. For Jesus, the moment of death is the beginning of his victory that will be evidenced in his resurrection. In that sense, Jesus' Passion, Resurrection and Ascension are part of the same mystery of his glorification. In his death, the Father will glorify him and, at the same time, the Father will glorify himself through Jesus' acts of obedience. As Jesus has glorified the Father by doing his will until death on the cross, the Father, in turn, will glorify him by raising him from the dead.

After the mention of glory, Jesus recommends his disciples to love one another. He says: "I give you a new commandment; love one another. As I have loved you, so you should love one another. This how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

What type of love Jesus is talking about? For sure, it is not about "Eros", that concept, which in ancient Greek refers to sensual or passionate love, from which the term erotic is derived. Here love means "Agape", that is, a love that seeks above all the wellbeing of the fellow, a love without limits and restrictions. It is an unconditional love that transcends and persists regardless of circumstances of life. Jesus repeats the commandment to love one another three times. That is surely an instance that highlights its importance.

A question that comes up is this: 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 for instance, 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". In that perspective, the law of love was not new to the ears of the Israelites. However, in the Jewish understanding, the neighbor was a fellow Jew and not a stranger. The strangers, on the contrary, were considered pagans, feared and avoided.

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 unconditionally. As he has loved each one as a child of God with compassion and without distinction, so should his disciples do.

Love, then, is at the heart of the Church and of our life as disciples of Jesus. It is the mark of our identity as Christians. It is the vestment that makes us different from others. If we wear that vestment, we belong to Jesus. If we are not wearing it, we are out of his Kingdom. When Jesus recommends us to love one another as he has loved us, he is asking us to imitate him and to give a witness that we belong to him.

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 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.

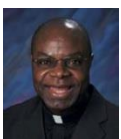
But, when Jesus is asking us to love one another, he is asking us to do it beyond the criteria, sympathy or empathy we might have toward people. Jesus himself sets an example for us. By loving as he did, we bear witness to the world that we belong to Jesus. I sincerely believe that the world is hungry for people who can love that way. 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.

In order to love that way, we have to change our attitudes, our ways of being, of relating to God and to each other. We have to love ourselves enough, as we are. If we have never loved ourselves, we will have trouble loving others. As nobody can give to others what he does not have, our lack of self-love becomes a handicap in what our love of others should be.

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. 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. Let us show to others tolerance, acceptance, 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



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