

5th Sunday Easter (C)

19th May 2019

'A New Commandment'

Acts 14: *all that God had done with them* Apoc 21: *a new heaven and a new earth*
Jn 13: 31–35: *by this love for one another everyone will know you are my disciples*

It's another very short passage this week, rather like last week's! We got 4 vv. last week — this week we get 5! What can the Gospel say in 5 vv.? Well, actually, quite a lot, especially when they are the very words of Christ, at the Last Supper, on the brink of the Passion: Judas exits and the events are set in motion that will bring about the Crucifixion and then the Resurrection.

In this moving moment, when His life and ministry is all careering towards its conclusion, Jesus utters some words of great import. The apostles must have been taken aback by what Jesus uttered and enacted in that Last Supper: His washing of their feet; His great teaching discourses; His establishment of the greatest of the Sacraments, the Holy Eucharist; then as He speaks of His going away from them — words of such poignancy, sorrow, glory as He helps them face up to what is about to happen, the consummation of His earthly ministry, the Passion.

In the midst of all this, Jesus utters words that are

both familiar to us, and yet ever-new. *"I give you a new Commandment: Love one another, as I have loved you."* A new commandment? Then what was the old? *"Love the Lord your God ... Love your neighbour as yourself."* What was wrong with these? Nothing! But Jesus is now able to say more, to extend the old commandment, to put more 'flesh on the bones' as it were. He is able to exemplify that commandment to love, so that we have a better grasp of what it means to love, properly. *"I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you."*

It would be good to explore what it means, 'to love as Jesus loved.' What characterizes Jesus's way of loving, that we are asked to imitate?

1. His loving was: open, generous, broadly welcoming. He spoke to blind beggars, synagogue officials, lepers, prostitutes, centurions, Pharisees, bereaved parents, thieves on the Cross. He did not limit those to whom He spoke, but spread His divine message as widely as possible. He did not discriminate. He called each and everyone to conversion and new life, regardless of status.

2. His loving was: compassionate, as He reached out in particular ways to the sick, the outcasts, the bereaved, the frightened, the hungry. He healed and He brought comfort, often with miracles. Not displays of divine power for the sake of spectacle, but for the sake of the needs of the suffering. And it was merciful.
3. His loving was: linked to His love for the Father, and therefore it was always accompanied by evangelization. “As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you,” He says. His loving was never just for secular wellbeing, but was always associated with the origin of all loving, which is the Love which God the Trinity is.
4. His loving was: sacrificial, a “love to the end,” to the uttermost. “No man can have greater love,” said Jesus, “than that He lay down His life for His friends.” Jesus’s love reaches its highpoint in the sacrifice on the Cross. This is what true loving means: not self-seeking pleasure, but utterly for the good of the other — in other words, for us. Jesus dies out of love for us, He offers His life for us. No-one but Jesus could love us this much.

Our Lord Jesus manifests, then, and models what it means to love as He loves. But the final line of the Gospel brings this home to us in a more acute way, doesn’t it? Because He states that what we should be aiming at is to be seen — noticed by others! — for loving in this way that marks us out as Christians! “By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another.” In other words, if we are loving as Jesus loves, then we will be distinguished, and distinctive, as His followers, because our loving stands out as ... generous and outgoing; compassionate and healing; linked specifically to our faith in the God of love; sacrificial, boundless, humble and of limitless service, “to the end.” This we cannot ignore. Does our loving stand out like this? Are we known for being lovers of Jesus because our loving of Him and of others is utterly demonstrated by our actions? Do we stand out at all in our daily life, as to our loving? Let’s implore the gifts of Jesus’s Holy Spirit to fill us once again with the sort of love that allows Jesus to shine out from us upon a world in so much need of that kind of loving.