



May 15, 2022

Fifth Sunday of Easter

"I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride...." Revelation 21:2



Dear Friends,



The icon to the left is entitled, *Our Lady of Palestine*. It embodies the images that come from today's reading from the Book of Revelation. In the Scriptures individuals can represent more than just the individual person. For example, Mary can represent more than the mother of Jesus. At Pentecost she represents the whole Church gathered. At the Wedding at Cana Mary is the model of Christian discipleship—she intercedes for those in need and invites others to “do as Jesus tells you to do.”

In this icon Mary who, in her womb, gave flesh/matter to the Word now represents a transformed creation. She sits on a seat that represents the new creation's place of privilege. She also holds in her arms the new Jerusalem. It is the place of God's permanent dwelling. Cities in the ancient world were always personified as feminine. Mary here represents the Church as the Bride of Christ—the Lamb once slain, who lives forever.

The Book of Revelation gives us communal images of intimacy. God dwelt in the Tent of Meeting during the Israelite community in their journey through the wilderness. Now God will permanently make his dwelling amid a renewed creation and people.

In the seer John's vision, there is no longer a sea. The ancient Israelites were land-lovers. The oceans represented to them the chaos that often threatens to overcome us. So, with no sea the new cosmos does not even have the possibility of chaos. In this new Jerusalem and cosmos, any threats to human well-being—from death to pain and suffering—will cease to exist.

In our reading from the Gospel of John, Jesus at the Last Supper is urging his followers “love one another as I have loved you. God's love for his people in the Hebrew Testament is expressed by the Hebrew word *hesed*. This is translated as “steadfast/faithful love.” In the Covenant agreement with the Israelites *Hesed* describes God's attitude toward the people of God. In the Prophet Hosea, God addresses the people as his bride. He promises to marry Israel in “faithful love (*hesed*) and tenderness.”

The word that Jesus uses for love in John's Gospel, in the original Greek, is *agape*. This is divine love for all creation. It not only is the love God has for us. It is our response to God's love and the love we share as sisters and brothers in the covenant family. *Agape* is the outpouring of mercy, healing, tenderness, and care.



In the Eastern Christian Churches, *agape* love is pictured in the icon of *The Mother of God of Loving-kindness*. The intimacy of the human-divine child pressed cheek to cheek is a visual image of the merciful, tender, never-ending love that God has for us. The human and divine, spirit and matter, heaven and earth will be one. Like a mother can never forget her child so God can never forget us. We are called to love with same tenderness all people. Mary, image of the Church, sign of a new and transformed cosmos, shows us the way. Just as she gave birth to the Incarnate Word of Mercy so too, we must give birth to a new kind of all inclusive, healing, and transforming love. Such love prepares us to receive the newness of God's coming reign.

Christ is Risen!

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church