

May 15, 2022

11:30 a.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

Fifth Sunday of Easter/Scout Sunday

Even though these last few days have felt more like mid-August than mid-May, we continue to enjoy this beautiful, vibrant Season of Spring. And as we do so, we also continue celebrating the Joy and New Life of the Easter Season. This Fifth Sunday of Easter could be called “Spring” Sunday, or “New Life” Sunday. Each of the Scripture Readings we just heard speak of the “newness” that flows from our relationship with God and, in particular, they speak to us about the New Life we share in the Risen Lord.

Today’s First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles told us about Paul and Barnabas being “on the move”. In the 6 verses of this brief Reading, we are told that Paul and Barnabas had visited 9 different cities. It might be hard for us who have become quite used to our advanced automobile Navigation Systems, or the GPS apps on our Phones to realize how hard that had to be in those days to figure out how to get from one place to another; and then to actually get there. And as we heard, some of their travels were by sailboats; other parts on foot; and who knows what other modes of transportation they might have employed. But the old saying “where there’s a will, there’s a way” seems to have been what was at work within these first “missionary disciples”. They were motivated by a deep commitment to sharing the Good News of the Risen Jesus---a message that they were so passionate about that they could not keep it to themselves. Not only did they go to all those places, they were amazingly effective everywhere they went. As that Reading told us, in every one of the cities they visited, *“they strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith.”* It’s even more amazing when we are reminded what a big part of their message was: *“It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”* Paul and Barnabas and the other early “missionaries” weren’t making any “pie-in-the-sky”, or trite, promises to those who heard this Good News of Jesus. As the Reading told us, they truly *“opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”*. Today’s First Reading shows the “newness” of the Good News of the Gospel spreading throughout the world like wildfire.

In our Second Reading from the Book of Revelation, we heard St. John’s vision of *“a new heaven and a new earth”*. And in that “new city of Jerusalem”, we

heard this incredible revelation: *“Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be His people, and God Himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes.”* And that Reading concluded with an amazing promise from the Risen Jesus: *“Behold I make all things new.”*

Finally, today’s Gospel passage shows us Jesus at the Last Supper. Having given us the Gift of the Eucharist, and then having demonstrated what true Leadership requires as Jesus had washed the feet of all His Apostles, this passage picks up with telling us: *“Judas left”* to initiate the despicable plan that Satan had seduced him into betraying his own Master. Jesus knew that the time of His arrest was near, which would lead to His suffering and death---“the End”, so to speak. And yet, what does Jesus immediately say? *“Now is the Son of Man glorified.”* Jesus sees this as the ultimate “new beginning” that would lead to His Final Victory over sin and death. That was why He had come into the world; that has been what He had been working toward all throughout His life. That is what will be His “Glory” and how in turn “God will be glorified”--- by accomplishing the Salvation of all Humanity.

But, even before that, Jesus does something else totally “new”. He said to the Apostles, and to all of us: *“My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. I give you a NEW commandment: love one another.”* That command “to love one another” was not what was “new”. How Jesus told them/us we’re supposed to “love”---that was radically new and extremely challenging: *“As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.”* Jesus was about to put into action what “loving as He loves” ultimately means. He was about to give of Himself completely, totally, sacrificially, willingly, and unconditionally. THAT’s how Jesus “commands” us to love one another----just like He has loved us. And then Jesus said: *“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

It’s not about whether we come to Mass; although coming to Mass is really important. It’s not about whether we fast on Fridays or on specially-designated days; although that too is very important. It’s not about how strictly we follow the Commandments, or adhere to all the Church’s teachings; although doing so is critically important so that we can live good, holy lives. We come to Mass, we receive the Sacraments, especially Confession and Holy Communion, we fast and pray and try to be faithful Catholics precisely so that we can “love one another as Jesus loves us”. Without the Grace of God that comes to us through prayer and

the Sacraments, we will be unable to be up to that final and most important of Jesus' commands: *"As I have loved you, so you should love one another."* And when we "love one another as Jesus loves us" ----that is what will catch people's attention, especially in these days when there is so much discord and rancor among people; when there is so much division between various groups; when there is so much hostility to those who believe something different, look different, act different; when there is such a tendency to lash out at others with violent actions and hurtful words. When we choose to "love one another AS Jesus loves us" ----completely, totally, sacrificially, willingly and unconditionally---- people won't even have to ask; they'll know that we are followers of Jesus, the Risen One, Who has come to make all things "new".

Earlier this week, I had the opportunity to view a Video conference that the Head of the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine, His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, had with the Bishops of the United States. For having such an esteemed position of leadership, His Beatitude is very young, only in his late 50's, and he was extremely articulate as he shared with us the state of affairs in his beloved country, which continues under attack now for almost 3 months. He described in detail the deaths of thousands of people, and the suffering of all those who remain from injuries sustained in the attacks, trauma, and so much other misery. He told us about the destruction of whole cities, including many, many churches; he related how all the churches that remain, including his own Cathedral in Kiev, have been turned into hospitals and relief centers; how his own residence has become a warehouse to store supplies that are coming from many places around the world, including from here in the U.S., which then he can help to distribute to those in desperate need. He talked about the pain of not just seeing soldiers being killed, but innocent citizens indiscriminately killed whose only "crime" is to admit to being Ukrainian. He emotionally recounted the open atrocities of sexual abuse being performed against children in public, forcing their parents to helplessly watch. And he told of the untold numbers of people who are dying, not just from the bombs and rockets, but from starvation, as the occupying forces refuse to allow relief supplies into certain areas. He shared all that with us so that we could be informed, share that information, and continue to support them with our financial contributions and with our prayers. But what was most moving to me was when, toward the end of his 30-minute presentation, the Cardinal said: "Our Church is a big Family---a Family of Christ who love one another. Because of this "inner power of the love of Christ", even though we are being persecuted and humiliated, we are fortified to withstand this aggression." And then he

concluded: "In spite of all this, we believe in the Risen Christ. We are serving in the Name of Christ for those suffering, and we keep trying to save lives and stand up for what is right."

No one needs to even ask---it's so clear that they are truly disciples of Christ; they are truly "loving one another AS Jesus loves us".

When you're not here for Mass----when you're at work, in Meijer's, at the Ballfield, socializing with your friends, out on a date, at home with your family, alone with your spouse----would people know you, or I, am a Disciple of Jesus just by looking at the way you live your life?

As Paul and Barnabas told the first Christians so clearly: *"It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."* But we're not alone in trying to do so. Jesus has given us His life-giving Word, and He continues to nourish us with Himself in the Precious Gift of the Eucharist. And we have one another---this "Big Family of the Risen Christ"---to support us along our Journey of Faith, until that day when we will actually enter into what St. John's vision only foretold: *"A new Heaven and a new Earth" where "God will wipe every tear from our eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order will have passed away."* And we will hear Jesus say: *"Behold, I make all things new!"*

God bless you, now and always.