

Homily for 5th Easter

Our Scripture Readings for today are a mixed group, but each reflects the Easter message of 'new life.' All three of them inevitably speak about 'newness,' and at the same time stand on a firm common ground and build blocks over it, ever raising it tall. Today's first Reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, gives an insight into that. The Apostles' love, now grown to a height it never achieved in the Gospels, brought about the beginning of the new City of God. The instructions the Apostles were giving, the prayers the early Christians were offering, and the common life they were living were contributing to the development of the Church. And Paul and Barnabas, had strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith. Their very successful journey established Christianity in Cyprus, Pisidia, Lyconia, and Pamphilia to present-day Cyprus and Turkey. They learned that it was God's will to open the Church to the Gentiles.

In the Book of Revelation, the former heaven and the former earth have passed away – that is to say, the temporary nature of time will turn into the everlastingness of eternity. The author's concept is more breathtaking than models of new cities. It is based on the concept that Jesus' resurrection isn't some isolated once-and-for-all event, but a great cosmic reversal of everything that is usual into things that are surprising, wonderful, and unexpected. In this new order, God is imaged as one living in the midst of his people - loving them and they loving him. The reading says, "The home of God is among mortals." We hear those beautiful words which are reminiscent of God's promises to the Israelite people during the time of Abraham and Moses - "I will dwell with them and they will be my people and I will dwell with them always as their God." Also, the New Jerusalem is imaged as the Bride of the Risen Christ, which is the Church. The presence of the bride groom, Risen Jesus himself, is a sign of joy. God promises that he will make all things new in Jesus and all the old will be taken away.

We are now living in that new place that was built by the blood of Jesus and the love of the First Apostles. We must learn how to live here well, so that the early Christians' love, which was to the limits of endurance, has not been in vain. In the midst of our hardships and disappointments, which are no greater than the hardships and disappointments of Jesus and the first Apostles, we must continue to re-create the universe and establish a new social order. It means, in short, to build and improve our new city. That new city is not the space-age city of plastic bubbles, climate control, living in space, and the like, but the perpetually fascinating, ever-challenging, and always needed city of the spirit, of love. Jesus says to us, "a new commandment I give to you – 'love one another as I have loved you.'" Love is the cross and the cross is of the essence of life. In warfare, it is not so much the ones who come back who are memorialized, but those who gave their lives; in medicine, it is not the ones who have made money, but those who sacrificed to find cures and to ease people's pain; in statesmanship, it is not the ones who made headlines for a while, but those who have provided the best for their nation and the human race. Today, it is in our hands. All we have to do is follow the lead of Jesus the Lord, who is our perfect example. There is a story about a man who had a huge boulder in his front yard. He grew weary of this big, unattractive stone in the centre of his lawn. He decided to take advantage of it and turn it into an object of art. He went to work on it with hammer and chisel, and chipped away at the huge boulder until it became a beautiful stone elephant. When he was finished it was gorgeous. It was breath-taking. A neighbour asked, "How did you ever carve such a marvellous likeness of an elephant?" The man answered, "I just chipped away everything that didn't look like an elephant!" Let God chip everything out of our lives that doesn't look like love. And this is the Good News of today.

I failed my driving test today. The instructor asked me, "What do you do at a red light?" I said, "I usually check my emails and see what people are up to on Facebook."