

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Cycle C-April 24, 2016

Did you notice the scene of this Gospel we just proclaimed? The upper room, on the night before Jesus died.

The Church would have us go back to reflect on this scene in the upper room to bring us back to the crux of the matter...literally. You see, it's easy for us to get all wrapped up in the glory of the moment when we reflect on the victory of the resurrection. There is something warm and fuzzy about seeing the flowers of spring, the glow of the Paschal Candle, the "brightness" of the colors of Easter, and the comfort of hearing the post-resurrection stories of the Risen Christ.

And so today we are given the opportunity to reflect on two things...glory and love. To understand both of these things it takes the Passion and Resurrection. And so we return to that upper room.

Context is always important in looking at a biblical passage. Just prior to today's gospel reading we hear of the coming betrayal of Judas.

The passages immediately following today's gospel are those predicting the three denials of Peter.

And so today's gospel is framed by these two things.

Jesus begins speaking by saying, "Now..." "*Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.*"

This doesn't seem like the most opportune time to speak of being glorified, when the "Now" is a moment surrounded by treachery and disappointment. Humans have failed at this crucial moment in Jesus' life. Judas and Peter represent all of us in our worst moments. We may fail him.

But my friends, he will not fail. Neither Jesus, nor his Father will fail us. Nothing can stop what is coming. Nothing can thwart what is to be revealed...God's revelation of love for all humankind. "Now" is glorious because it is the moment when God's love shines through human sin and darkness...shines on the matter of human alienation from God and from one another.

"I give you a new commandment: love one another."

How is "love one another" a new commandment? The 19th Chapter of Leviticus outlines laws that is about love of neighbor. What's new about Jesus' call to love at this moment?

The love Jesus speaks of does not necessarily lead to warm feelings. It is not the love defined by "duty" in the Old Testament. Sometimes it leads to hurt.

Sometimes it leads to suffering. Sometimes it is hard to see the fruits. But then again the love Jesus speaks of is agape...a love that one gives of oneself without counting the cost. It is a love that is not turned off or restricted, even when one is betrayed or let down by those closest to us. It

is a love that is not extinguished under trial and when one is treated unjustly. It is a love even for enemies and, in the face of opposition, speaks the truth—which Jesus will soon do at his trial.

It may mean, letting the other person have the last word. It may mean that each time we see one of those Facebook posts that speak ill of our politicians, of our president, of a candidate, we stop and say a prayer for the one being slandered and look for the good in them. And we say a prayer for those who do the slandering.

This kind of love means that when we hear of persecutions, yes we weep and we pray for those treated unjustly, but we also weep and pray for those who do such horrific acts. They are God's children as well.

Jesus points us to a love that is beyond ourselves. We are called to emulate Jesus. And if one thinks, "I can't do that! I could never love as Jesus loves!", I would have to agree. But there is one person that we often forget...the Holy Spirit! It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that all of this is possible. To love as Jesus loves is an act of the Spirit.

Tradition tells us that the beloved disciple, John the Evangelist, the one who gives us today's Gospel and the second reading from Revelation, was the only apostle who was not martyred. He lived to a ripe old age.

Disciples would seek his council, disciples who would struggle and grapple with the same kinds of issues we face. They would approach this humble man, this beloved one whom Jesus loved, expecting some deep response to help them to deepen their own faith and understanding.

He always responded with one word...LOVE.
Just...LOVE!

A couple of weeks ago we heard of the redemption of Peter...“Peter, do you love me?” three times. Peter got his chance.

In my own prayer, I have imagined Jesus going into the dead after his death on the cross, and before his Resurrection. There are two figures that he encounters. One is his earthly father, Joseph. It is an embrace of love and gratitude. The other encounter...Judas. There are tears. There is an embrace of love and forgiveness. There is love in a powerful moment. It is not a scene that you will find in the Scriptures, but it is a scene we can all imagine if we embrace Jesus' agape love.

The glory of this Easter Season is found in a new heaven and a new earth that is rooted in love. At the end of mass we will be charged with “Glorifying the Lord by our lives.” We are sent to go out into the world, to share that love that Jesus calls us to. Let's take time to study and pray those Works of Mercy. Others will know that we are disciples of Jesus, by how we love each other, and how we love them.

— *Deacon Paul Lewis*