

The 5th Sunday of Easter — May 19, 2019

The First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles recounts the end of Paul's first Missionary journey. He and Barnabas retrace their steps, encouraging the little communities they have founded, and preparing them for persecutions which would inevitably come. The Church has now been opened up to all Gentiles non-Jews, and is about to flourish under the direction of the Apostles, and the Guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Over two Millennia, we have certainly lost a lot of that momentum and power. But the Good News is that His Holy Spirit is still available to lead and guide us everyday. All we have got to do is ask for that Gift, and make ourselves available to receive it.

In the Gospel, the scene is the Last Supper. Judas has departed, and the others are left alone with Jesus. It provides Him the opportunity to have an intimate conversation with them, and also with us ! Jesus invites them to 'bear fruit' and to bear witness to Him. And He was very clear on how that would be accomplished. It became the mantra for every generation that would follow. I give you a New Commandment: love one another Indeed this, in and of itself, was not a new Commandment, but was rather a reiteration of something He had taught them from the outset.

We are all so familiar with that Commandment. We know it innately, and we can proscribe and proclaim it to one another rather readily sometimes. The newness of this Commandment is in fact in the addendum He adds. And it gives the Command the "beef" and the power that we have not seen heretofore. The New Commandment is to love one another 'AS I Have Loved You.' It is a whole new standard, and it begins with Him.

"As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Now this, in truth, changes everything ! That it is not loving others out of our own limited cache of love ... but rather loving out of an keen awareness that He has first loved us. This sets a new standard 'As I have loved you' In other words, if we do not deeply know, and become aware of how He has first loved us, then we are facing an impossible task. This task is accomplished only through the power of that parting Gift He has given us in the world namely The Holy Spirit. I can only love as He has directed

me, if I accept His Gift of the Holy Spirit. In many times, and in many places, Christians have gone after worldly success, and in many instances have achieved it. But in doing so, some have forgotten the one thing the Master expects of us, namely, to Love.

By this 'all will know that you are my disciples.' Love makes us instruments of God's providence in the lives of others. Our love can become the Channel through which they will experience the Love of God. Our world is starved for that type of affection.

Writing about his experience in Auschwitz, Ellie Wiesel said the Germans tried to get the inmates to forget relatives and friends, to think only of themselves, and to tend only to their own needs, or else they would perish. "That is what they kept telling us day and night," Wiesel says, "But, what happened was the exact opposite. Those who lived only for themselves, had less chance of surviving, while those who lived for a parent, a brother, a friend, an ideal, had a better chance of getting out alive. It was through what they gave that they survived."

Selfishness keeps us shut in. It confines us. It erects barriers, even walls between us and others. What frees us from that captivity is serious affection for others. Being friends, being brothers and sisters, is what opens that prison Love is the only thing that frees us from the prison of selfishness. And it all begins with the awareness That He has first loved us.

An American journalist, watching Saint Mother Teresa as she cared for a man with gangrene, remarked, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." Mother Teresa replied, "Even I wouldn't do it for that amount....However, I do it out of love for God." It would be fair to say she understood and integrated this teaching. May we also be blessed in that way!

— Fr. Gerry Hurley