

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

*Gospel: John 13:31-35*

When Judas had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

### REFLECTION 1: ANYTHING NEW?

Today it is difficult to come up with something new. Even 16/17 year olds have 'seen it all'. Yet, we expect a person's last words to be more sacred and significant than most of the other things he or she said in the course of a lifetime. Impending death has a way of sharpening what we say. So, on the night Jesus was betrayed and Judas had vanished into the night, Jesus began his last words with his disciples. He told them that he would be with them only for a short while. A statement that devastated them. Then Jesus said, 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another'. Was this really a new commandment? You'll find the same words centuries before Jesus in the Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament (Lev. 19:18) 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself'. These words were prominent in Jewish tradition. Where people have been civilized, there has been an awareness of the critical importance of loving one's neighbour. So, why does Jesus refer to it as something new?

'Love one another', 'Love your neighbour as yourself', - ancient commandments. However when these words are genuinely heard and subsequently obeyed, there is utter newness. New revolutionary things begin to happen. Consider how new and even startling it was when centuries after Leviticus, a man appeared in Palestine who loved his neighbour as himself. When the commandment was actually lived out, something so new happened that it threatened all those who had invested in the status quo. The religious establishment in Jerusalem couldn't handle Jesus' radical fulfilment of the ancient commandment they had known all their lives. The commandment to love was old, as long as it stayed in print. When it was embodied it was altogether new, with awesome implications. In Jesus a higher kind of love was revealed, as Divine love transforms all known forms of loving. Jesus' love was like God's love, gracious and self-giving to the point of costly sacrifice. 'No one has greater love than this', Jesus said 'than to lay down one's life for one's friends', (John 15:13) then he demonstrated that love on the cross.

Jesus also said that faithfulness to his new commandment was how the disciples would be recognised in the world, 'By this everyone will know, that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another'. We are not to be known by our spirituality or our piety, or by our superior knowledge, college degrees – but by the way we love. Even the pagans in the early days of Christianity, remarked among one another 'See these Christians how they love each other' (Acts). With respect to the writer of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament there really is something new under the sun!

## REFLECTION 2:

## NO MORE FEAR

A feeling of fear can grip us at any time. Sometimes fear can persist for long periods, like the fear of being homeless, unemployed, in debt or momentarily, by things that go bump in the night. However we name it, fear is ultimately a fear of death and her little sisters, pain and diminishment.

Even before we begin to articulate what we feel we are acting out of those fears. Fear of mortality looms as the decisive limiting factor of all human activity and we tend to interpret every threat as somehow a hint of death.

Well, the good news is that fear of death is the trap from which Jesus wishes to free us. That's why in today's Gospel (Jn. 13: 31-35) Jesus could speak of his upcoming passion, not as suffering or shame, but as his glorification. The triumph of the cross happened at the moment the dying Jesus proclaimed 'It is finished'. That was the moment of his final victory when he announced that God's love is greater than death. So, Jesus could say, 'God will glorify him (Jesus) at once'. Jesus was free from fear of death because he believed in who he was as Son of the Heavenly Father. He was free to face death, pain and shame because he knew that they could never define him. He had to die in order to fully make known that truth about himself and God. That is why at The Last Supper Jesus combined the explanation of his imminent glory with the command that his disciples love as he did. If the world is to know Jesus and his glory, it will only be through those who share his freedom and live in his love.

Jesus calls it 'a new commandment'. In fact, it really is different from the command to love our neighbour and our enemy. This commandment is not focused on the stranger but rather on our Christian brothers and sisters. It is a directive from Jesus to us to live in relationships of mutual love - relationships that allow God's love to become visible and tangible in our world. That's why the pagans remarked of the early Christians, 'See these Christians how they love one another' (Acts). As Pope Francis has said of evangelization, 'New members don't come by being proselytized but by attraction'.

The Gospel is always centred in love and when love becomes visible between people in community it reveals the underlying glory of God's presence. Only if we are secure in the promise of eternity will we risk giving ourselves away in love and such love is only possible because of the resurrection.