

# 5th Sunday of Easter

## **I. Introduction: A Word of Greeting**

What a joy for me to visit St. Ignatius Parish for the first time and to have the opportunity to pray with you and to meet so many of you. I am very grateful to Msgr. Barker, Fr. Hector, Fr. Sutton, and Fr. Muller, and also Deacon Hamilton, for their devoted service to this parish and to all of you for your leadership, fidelity, and generosity.

## **II. Good News**

There is one word that runs like a thread through today's readings. It is the word "new" or "news". In the Acts of the Apostles we read how Paul and Barnabas "proclaimed the Good News...and made a considerable number of disciples..." They went far and wide proclaiming the Good News, establishing the Church, and exhorting Christ's followers to stand firm amid many trials.

In the reading from the Book of Revelation, John relates a vision in which he saw "a new heaven and a new earth" – indeed "a new Jerusalem", a phrase that refers to Church as a new dwelling place for God set up by Christ through the Holy Spirit. As John's vision continued, he saw the One seated on the Throne, viz., God the Father and heard him say, "Behold, I make all things new!"

And in the Gospel, we again encounter Jesus, this time speaking with his disciples on the eve of his Passion and Death. In the poignant moment before he is glorified by dying for our sins, Jesus tells the disciples, "I give you a new commandment: love one another." In and of itself, that was not a new commandment because the Old Law instructed the Chosen People to love one another. What was new about the commandment Jesus gave was this: "As I have loved you, so you should love one another..." Loving others as Jesus has loved us: that is what is new. For Jesus does not love us only when we love him in return. As Pope Francis said so movingly in his homily at St. John Lateran: "We hear many offers from the world around us, but let us take God's offer instead: his is a caress of love. For God, we are not numbers, we are important, indeed we are the most important thing to him. Even if we are sinners, we are what is closest to his heart."

### **III. Bad News**

Every day we go about daily routine. We commute to work, often sitting in traffic for long periods of time. Whatever line of work we may be in, we encounter the politics of the work place – who's in, who's out, who's getting ahead, who's falling behind, and much more. Rare is the person whose integrity is so great that he or she can entirely rise above the intrigue of the workplace, be it petty or momentous.

And if we examine our relationships, whether at home, or at work, or among our colleagues and friends, most of us will find that some of them are in need of repair; some may be so broken that we feel they can never be fixed. Or we will find that some of our relationships are complicated, maybe more complicated than they need to be. And we may find that there are people with whom we have no relationship because we have no interest in them or they have no interest in us. At other times, we seem to have more a relationship with our mobile devices than we have with our family members, classmates, and colleagues. How often do we sneak a peek the messages on our I-phone we should be listening to someone else and giving them our undivided attention?

And so the refrain of the old song rings true to our experience: "It's still the same old story, a fight for love and glory . . . as time goes by. . ." The truth is that sinful, self-centered behaviors, grudges and hatreds, intrigue and lies, getting ahead at any cost, valuing things over persons, and so forth... this is old news, the old news of sin, the old news of the culture of death. And the one thing that sin and hatred never accomplishes is this: it never makes us happy.

### **IV. The Good News Personified**

Now let's be clear. There is no consensus out there that Christianity is new. It is usually painted as antediluvian, medieval, anti-scientific, and boring. Sometimes you parents know how hard it is to get your children to come to church. Almost anything else seems to be more interesting than Mass and let's face it there are a lot of adults who feel the same way. They may slice their tee shots every time but that still seems "newer" than taking part in Mass on the weekend.

Yet sometimes people come onto the scene that cause us to take a second look. Pope Francis has captured everyone's attention by his simplicity and directness, by the

gesture of embracing a young person with special needs in St. Peter's Square, by showing us the heart of a pastor. Mother Teresa, who died in 1999, continues to capture our attention because she took the Gospel literally, lived it, and showed it to us by serving the poorest of the poor all around the world. This is why we need saints: we can see that the Good News really is new, that the Church offers us newness of life, that the command of the Lord is really a new command - when we see it lived. ...when someone's life is changed because he or she has encountered Christ, when someone joyfully and generously embraces the Gospel, when someone's life is turned around because they found the love they were looking for.

## **V. Newness of Life**

In his beautiful encyclical on God's love, Pope Benedict taught us that what makes Christianity new is the Person of Christ. Once we have experienced his pure and passionate love for us in the very depths of our hearts, then we will want to love him and to love others as he has loved us. Once we have encountered that love which lifts us up and out of the same old problems and the same old sins, which helps us to see even the most routine day, even a frustrating day as a day that is new and beautiful because it is filled with God's grace, then we will be experiencing what St. Paul calls, "newness of life" - not a new idea, not a passing novelty, but a whole new way of living.

The source for that new life is not far away. Sometimes when I find myself lapsing into anger or cynicism, I think of myself as a parched man in a desert who does not realize that there is an oasis nearby. The source of this new life and joy is the Word of God as it comes to us through the Church; it is the Body and Blood of Christ, sacrificed out of love for us on the Cross, and offered to us whenever Holy Mass is celebrated; it is the Presence of the Risen Lord in our Church and in our hearts; it's having our sins forgiven in the Sacrament of Reconciliation; it is having a relationship of love with Christ in our life of prayer as individuals and as families.

None of those things are new. But they are brimming with the new life of the Resurrection. And they are the means by which we can come to a point in our lives when we are loving others not in the old way but in the new way: "as Christ has loved us" ... putting neither reputation, nor wealth, nor anything whatever before our love of our brothers and sisters... willing to give of ourselves to them, to sacrifice for

them, and not to count the cost. In this old world, that kind of love is always new.  
This is love that makes us new!

May God bless us and keep us always in His love!