

5th Sunday of Easter

Today's readings are about new things: *the New Jerusalem, a new Heaven and a new earth, and a new commandment*. Rev: 21:5a - God tells us that His saving and healing work in the world is ongoing: "*See, I am making all things new*". Today's Gospel passage gives us the secret of Christian renewal as the faithful practice of Jesus' new commandment: "*Love one another as I have loved you*" (Jn: 13:35). Jesus has added a new element to the Old Testament command of love by telling us that the true test of discipleship is to love other people in the same way that He has loved us. So, the renewal of Christian life means a radical change of vision and a reordering of our priorities in life. Such a renewal brings us to embrace new attitudes, new values and new standards of relating to God, to other people and, indeed, to our whole environment. For most of us, "renewal" is something that comes at different stages in our lives, each time bringing us to a deeper understanding, insight and commitment.

Let us learn to love ourselves so that we may learn to love each other: The old commandment (*Lev 19:1-2, 9-18*), says: "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" How do we learn to cherish others and care for them, if we have never learned to do the same for ourselves? We live in a culture that devalues life and worships, we live in a death culture, in which, people drug themselves into unconsciousness. Women and girls are willing to starve themselves to fit some unrealistic media image of beauty and worth. People and relationships are sacrificed on the altar of "workaholism." How are we to love ourselves when we are told again and again that we are unlovable? How do we reclaim our basic worth? We can become whole and holy only when we learn to love ourselves properly, acknowledging the presence of the Triune God in our souls, making our bodies the "*temple of the Holy Spirit.*" Only those persons who are fully convinced that they are themselves lovable, because, God has loved them and so brought them into being can reach out comfortably and unconditionally to love those who themselves cannot love but can only hurt and hate and destroy. It is through constant love-centered interaction with God and each other that the "*new earth, the new Heaven and the new Jerusalem*" can begin to come into existence.

Let us love others in our daily lives: We are asked to love as Jesus loved, in the ordinary course of our lives. This means that we should love others by allowing ourselves to be moved with pity for them. We love others by responding to their everyday needs. We can show love by materially sharing with those who have less. We love others by comforting and protecting those who have experienced loss. We love others by serving others in every possible way no matter how small. We love others by forgiving rather than condemning, by challenging rather than ignoring. We love others by responding to the call of God in our lives and by walking in the footsteps of Jesus. We love others by making sacrifices for them. This is how the world will know that we are the Disciples of Christ.

Let us demonstrate our love for others: When we are assembled and have guests, we have an opportunity to demonstrate our love for one another. They must see Christians as people who are glad to see one another, who are willing to take the time to visit with each other and who know each other's names. Our assemblies may be the only time some guests have the opportunity to see Christians interact with love and concern for one another, an interaction that reveals the strong love and appreciation for one another which the members have. Christians will often sin against one another and offend one another. But others should see in us a quickness to forgive, even as Christ has forgiven us.

Our true living comes by opening ourselves to God and to the world by becoming persons open to do his will. The theme that dominates the readings of today is love and service. Jesus told his disciples to love one another as he himself had loved them. He showed the type of love they ought to have: he served them and washed their feet during the final meal. During the Last Supper he told them that there is no greater love than one giving his life for his friends and he gave his life for all, calling them his friends. He also defined for us, the meaning of God's love which is sacrificing and self-emptying love. God emptied himself and gave his only son for our sake that we may have life in him.