

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter: Resurrection is Renewing Us!

Acts 14:21-27; Psalms 145:8-9,10-11,12-13; Revelation 21:1-5a; John 13:31-33a,34-35

Dear family and friends of the co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Church,

There is always a joy when it is new - like a new car, a new gadget, a new house, a new friend, or a new relationship. We renew or renovate when it's old; when outmoded, upgrade; when worn-out, change to have a fresh look and experience. It is a natural drive of the human spirit to keep up or have something new because there is joy. However, this joy may fade away unexpectedly, for what is new will one day become old, or what is expensive may no longer be as important as you think.

This Sunday, our Lord Jesus offers us something new that will endure forever. Hence, the entire liturgy for today can be summed up in the one word, "new." It is not, however, about a new look or appearance. It is a new adventure and a way of looking up at things through the eyes of the risen Lord!

In the first reading, we are told that Paul and Barnabas moved out in an entirely new direction. Their faith in the risen Lord made them resilient against persecution. We heard them say, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). This confidence came from the power of the Resurrection of Jesus that transformed and impassioned them. They were recreated and led to open "the door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). They became instruments for building new communities of believers. They moved beyond Israel, from Antioch to Lystra and Iconium, then through Pisidia to Pamphylia, Perga, and Attalia, then back to Antioch, where they were first time called Christians. This is new to them!

On the other hand, St. John described these divine workings through a vision. He says he saw "a new heaven and a new earth, a new Jerusalem coming down from God." He echoed God's divine plan for all, "Behold, I make all things new." God is renewing each one of us! In some way, it echoes the creative act of God at the beginning of time when he created the world and all the living things – bestowing his breath, establishing order, and sharing his grandeur. St. John proclaims that the Resurrection of Jesus starts a new era, and amazing new things will follow.

The compelling promise that sustains this new direction and a way of looking up at things is the mandate of Jesus to his disciples. He said, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you" (Jn 13:34). His command to love is different from the existing command of God, "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength." This new command is not on loving one another but on what is bestowed upon them. It is a supernatural love from the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5; CCC 1822-29). Jesus commands divine love for one another that is modeled on his own acts of charity and generosity (15:13; 1 Jn 3:16-18) – a love that always desires for the good of the other person without condition, where service is rendered without counting the cost, where care for the lost, the less and the last is central, where mercy resides and where sin is forgiven. "As I have loved you, you should also love one another." If they are to love the way Jesus loves, they will be Jesus' love to one another. They became tangible presences of his love. As Jesus said, "This is how they will know that you are my disciples." So, wherever they go, they bring that love; wherever they are, they breathe his love; whenever they serve, they serve with love; whenever they speak, they speak with love. Wherever they are, they are Christians – little Christs.

What does this tell us?

First, the Resurrection assures us that God is working to renew us amid our mistakes, betrayals, wounds, and deaths; our future is forever pregnant with outstanding new possibilities. This is to say that Resurrection is not just a one-day event, that is, after death, then rising from the dead. Resurrection is about daily rising from all the darkness we sometimes, if not often, find ourselves entangled. It is allowing the Holy Spirit to renew what is stagnating in us and purify what is blocking the way of Jesus. It is allowing the Holy Spirit to radiate its smile on our faces. It has been the prayer of the Church to the Holy Spirit -- Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Holy Spirit, and they shall be created and renew the face of the earth.

Second, it guarantees that if we love as Jesus loves us, our teaching will be meaningful; our Christian symbols will not only be a decoration, but sacred signs of faith, and our ministry and social outreach will not be a show but acts of faith, there will be hope, and there will be a stable foundation for the community. This enduring love is bestowed upon the Church, in particulars, through Holy Sacraments. All the sacraments make the love of Jesus sacramentally present to

affect renewal. What God gives, he will always renew. He renews each one of us every time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist.

Two weeks ago, we launched the Parish Ministry Fair. One of the witness talks had touched the core of my priestly life. I remember Julie Ratum shared her reflection on how she's richly blessed with a good family. The feeling of joy and a sense of gratitude overwhelmed her. It led her to ask, "what can I offer you, Lord, and what do you want me to do?" Her questioning reflects Psalm 116:12, "How can I repay the Lord for all the great good done for me." A question such as this could be the voice of the risen Lord in our lives and meant to give us new directions and a new way of looking up at things. Julie, in her own way, responded to the divine voice. She started helping and serving others until she found her way to the social ministry of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Church.

Something new always comes out when we love the way Jesus loves. When his love is the measure of our action, there are always surprises that come out of it. We will be blessed with something new.

Let us anticipate that God is giving us something new this week and believe that he is renewing what he had given us!

God bless you.

Fr. Manny Hewe