

Homily of Fifth Sunday of Easter Year C, 2022

Acts 14:21-27; Psalm 145:8-13; Revelation 21:1-5; John 13:31-35

Today's readings draw our attention to the virtues that help us to live a good Christian life. The virtues are faith, hope and love. Let us locate the virtues in the three readings:

First reading: Paul and Barnabas "strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying, 'It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.' They appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith."

Second reading: "I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.' The One who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I will make all things new.'" The reading is an invitation to hope and to look forward to the blessings God has in stock for his faithful ones.

Gospel: "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Faith, hope and love are called Theological Virtues because they are "gifts infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life" (CCC 1813). Without faith, hope and love we are incapable of living out the other virtues: wisdom, courage, justice and self-control. These others are called Cardinal Virtues. The measure in which we receive faith, hope and love from God is the measure we practice our Christianity. Good input brings about good productivity. Low input brings about low productivity. Bad input brings about bad productivity. Whereby there is no input at all, there is zero productivity. Our Christian witnessing follows the same rule.

Paul and Barnabas spoke the words we read in the first reading to strengthen the disciples who were persecuted because they were Christians. Our faith in God is tested by difficulties and hardships. Paul and Barnabas speak the same words of encouragement to us: "Persevere in the faith." The Lord speaks to us in Hebrews 10:38, "My just one shall live by faith and if he draws back I take no pleasure in him." May we not draw back. Amen. St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:7, "For we walk by faith, not by sight."

For those whose hope in God remains unshaken in times of trials and hardships, God promises in the second reading to wipe every tear from their eyes, and make all things new. St. Paul teaches us the power of hope in Romans 5:2-5, "We boast in the hope of the glory of God... We even boast of our affliction, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us."

Jesus says in the Gospel, "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). We can only know that we have received God's love that is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit when we show that love to others. St. Paul writes, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you [may be] rooted and grounded in love..." (Ephesians 3:17). And in 1 Corinthians 13:8 & 13, he writes, "Love never fails... So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Jesus challenges us with these words, "As I have loved you, so you should love one another." Jesus' love is sacrificial, which resulted in his death on the Cross. Jesus' invitation means that some of us will be called to pay the supreme sacrifice for love of neighbor. This is a reality we need to bear in mind, and pray for the grace to accept the call if God wills it so. But all of us are called to die to self for the benefit of others since Jesus died on the Cross for the salvation of all.

With so much fears and anxieties within and around us, we bless ourselves and one another with these words of Jesus in today's gospel (John 14:27), "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP