

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year C, Catechist

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Tue, 03/05/2013 - 19:00

To prepare for the session, read all the readings.

Acts 14:21-27

Psalm 145:8-9, 10-11, 12-13

Revelation 21:1-5a

John 13:31-33a, 34-35

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading which appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word In Liturgy

The events surrounding the birth of new Christian communities described in Acts illustrate some essential elements of life in the Spirit of the Resurrected Christ. These communities are founded on the preaching of the apostles, and continually encouraged by them. They are structured communities of faith and prayer, helped by people such as the elders mentioned in today's reading. And the life of these communities is marked by love, and joy, and the attraction of new members.

Today's gospel reading is from the "farewell discourse" that Jesus makes to his disciples once the chain of events leading to his crucifixion has begun. Yet as Jesus speaks, it becomes clear that the evangelist has told the story in such a way that we do not merely hear the earthly Jesus speaking to his band of followers, but we hear the resurrected Lord speaking to his disciples through all the ages. Where the synoptic gospels place the account of the institution of the Eucharist as the memorial of Jesus, John's gospel situates Jesus' new commandment: "Love one another." The command to love is made specific: the disciples' love must be like the love that the exalted Jesus bears for them. Thus their love becomes a memorial and a sign of Jesus, even as the Eucharist is celebrated in imitation of and in memory of Jesus. It is the way that all will know that these are his disciples.

Catholic Doctrine

The New Commandment: Love One Another

The covenant made by God with the people of Israel was given expression through the Law of Moses. This Law symbolized the way God kept faith with the people and, in turn, the way they would keep faith with God. It not only expressed how people related to God but how they were to



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relate to each other, that is, it structured relationships within the community. For example, lying, stealing and adultery were forbidden by the Ten Commandments. Also, the way in which clans and families could go about exacting revenge was regulated so that the people would not forever be involved in blood feuds, tearing the social fabric completely apart. The code of behavior stipulated by the law of the old covenant was therefore seen not only as a challenge and an obligation but as a great gift to the whole community.

On this Sunday we celebrate the new commandment, the law of love, that Jesus gives us, his disciples. This law of love is not unknown to the old covenant. It is recorded in Deuteronomy (love God wholly and completely, 6:5) and in Leviticus (love your neighbor as yourself, 19:18). This new commandment of Jesus is new in that not only does he put these two injunctions together to express how the whole law is summed up, but Jesus, in his own person, by his life, his mission and his own sacrifice incarnates this command.

This new law of Jesus and the gospel does not negate the old law but perfects it and opens us believers to the full potential of that first covenant. And while the shape of the new law can be discerned in the New Testament scriptures, it is not codified in a series of prescriptions so much as brought to life by the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. As St. Paul writes, we “put on” the new person of Christ in baptism. In the same way, the new commandment of love is etched upon our hearts by not only pondering scripture but by partaking of the living tradition of discipleship in a church formed by the outpouring of the Spirit in Christ. In that way we “put on” love as the inner disposition of the garment of believers.

This new commandment to love is given explicit form by the example of Jesus who teaches his disciples to love as he himself loved them. Not only did he show them this love through the years of their mission together but he symbolized this love by washing their feet, and later by dying on the cross. Eucharist, as presented in John’s gospel, is thus the meal which symbolizes our following in the way of love, the way of service and sacrifice for one another.

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