



Living the Gospel



FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER — May 2, 2010

Theme: "I give you a new commandment, says the Lord: love one another as I have loved you"

Gathering Prayer

All: Loving God, you hear our prayers and grant our needs: help us to take up your Son's command to love so that our world might reflect your glory. We ask this through that same Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: John 13:31-33a, 34-35

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of the man glorified, and in him God is glorified, ³²if God is glorified him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. ³³Little children, yet a little while I am with you. ³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Gospel Notes

31-32. This glorification refers above all to the glory which Christ will receive once he is raised up on the cross (Jn 3:14; 12:32). St John stresses that Christ's death in the beginning of his victory: his very crucifixion can be considered his first step in his ascension to his Father. At the same time it is glorification of the Father, because Christ, by voluntarily accepting death out of love, as a supreme act of obedience to the Will of God, performs the greatest sacrifice man can offer for the glorification of God. The Father will respond to this glorification which Christ offers him by glorifying Christ as Son of Man, that is, in his holy human nature, through his resurrection and ascension to God's right hand. Thus the glory which the Son gives the Father is at the same time glory for the Son.

Christ's disciple will also find his highest motivation be identifying himself with Christ's obedience. St Paul teaches this very clearly when he says: "Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal 6:14).

33. From this verse onwards the evangelist recounts what is usually called the discourse of the Last Supper; in it we can distinguish three parts. In the first, our Lord begins by proclaiming the New Commandment (vv. 33-35) and predicts Peter's denial (vv.36-38); he tells them that his death means his going to his Father (chap 14), with whom he is one because he is God (vv. 1-14); and he announces that after his resurrection he will send them the Holy Spirit, who will guide them by teaching them and reminding them of everything he told them

The second part of the discourse is contained in chapter 15 and 16. Jesus promises to those who believe in him a new life of union with him, as intimate as that of a vine and its branches (15:1-8). To attain this union one must keep his New Commandment (vv. 9-18). He forewarns them about the contradictions they will suffer, and he encourages them by promising the Holy Spirit who will protect them and console them (vv. 18-27). The action of the Paraclete or Consoler will lead them to fulfil the mission Jesus has entrusted to them (16:1-15). The fruit of the presence of the Holy Spirit will be fullness of joy (vv.16-33).

The third part (chap. 17) gives Jesus' priestly prayer, in which he asks the Father to glorify him through the cross (vv. 1-5). He prays also for his disciples (vv. 6-19) and for all those who through him will believe in him, so that, staying in the world without being of the world, the love of God should be in them and They should bear witness to Christ being the envoy of the Father (vv. 20-26).

34-35. After announcing that he is leaving them (v. 33) Christ summarises his commandments in one – the New Commandment. He will repeat it a number of time during the discourse of the Last Supper (vv. Jn 15: 12, 17), and St John in his First letter will insist on the need to practice this commandment of the Lord and on the demands it implies (cf. 1 Jn 2:8; 3:7-21).

Love of neighbor was already commanded in the Old Testament (cf. Lev19-18)-and Jesus ratified this when he specified that it was the second precept of the Law and similar to the first: Love God with all your heart and soul and mind (cf. Mt 22: 37-40) But Jesus gives the precept of brotherly love new meaning and content by saying "even as I have loved you". The love of neighbor called for by the

Old Law did also in some way extend to one's enemies (Ex 23:4-5); however, the love which Jesus preaches is much more demanding and includes returning good for evil (cf. Mt 5:43-44), because Christian love is measured not by man's heart but by the heart of Christ, who gives up his life on the cross to redeem all men (cf. 1 Jn 4:9-11). Here lies the novelty of Jesus teaching, and our Lord can rightly say that it is his commandment, the principal clause in his last will and testament.

Love of neighbor cannot be separated from the love of God: "The greatest commandment of the law is to love God with one's whole heart and one's neighbor as oneself (cf. Mt 22: 37-40). Christ has made this love of neighbor his personal commandment and has enriched it with a new meaning when he willed himself, along with his brothers, to be object of this charity, saying: 'As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did to me' (Mt 25:40). In assuming human nature he has united to himself all humanity in a supernatural solidarity which makes of it a single family. He has made clarity the distinguished mark of his disciples, in his words: 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one another'" (Vatican II, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 8).

Even though Christ is purity itself, and temperance and humility, he does not, however, make any one of these virtues the distinguishing mark of his disciples: he makes charity that mark. "The Master's message and example are clear and precise. He confirmed his teachings with deeds. Yet I have often thought that , after twenty centuries, it is indeed still a new commandment, for very few people have taken the trouble to practice it. The others the majority of men, both in the past and still today, have chosen to ignore it. Their selfishness has led them to the conclusion: 'Why should I complicate my life? I have more than enough to do just looking after myself.'

"Such an example is not good enough for us Christians. If we profess the same faith and are eager to follow in the clear footprints left by Christ when he walked on this earth, we cannot be content merely with avoiding doing unto others the evil that we would not have them do unto us. That is a lot, but it is still very little when we consider that our love is to be measured in terms of Jesus' conduct. Besides, he does not give us this standard as a distant target, as a crowning point of a whole lifetime of struggle. It is-it ought to be I repeat, so that you may turn it into specific resolutions-our starting point, for our Lord presents it as a sign of Christianity: 'By this shall all men know that you are my disciples'" (J Escriva, *Friends of God*, 223).

And this is what in fact happened among Christians in the early centuries in the midst of pagan society, so much so that Tertullian, writing around the end of the second century, reported that people could indeed say, looking at the way these Christians lived: "See how they love one another" (*Apologeticum*,XXXIX).

Gospel Reflection

Sometimes novels, plays, and movies use flashback as a literary technique to help tell the story, fill in the details that are helpful for viewers to understand the unfolding tale, and/or to remind viewers of previous incidents. The gospel this Sunday functions if the lectionary as something of a flashback for us. The gospel's context is Jesus 'farewell' discourse to his disciples at the Last Supper-an event that took place *before* Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. Now we read this gospel *after* those events and hear Jesus' words in a new light. Death simultaneously reveals Jesus' glory and the full measure of his love for us: Jesus is willing to suffer and die not only that he might live but that all of us might share in that same glory and new life.

This flashback also helps us understand more clearly Jesus' final command to his disciples: "love one another." The "new commandment' Jesus gives is not simply to "love" but to love *as he has loved us*. With respect to loving, "how far?" is the question. Jesus' commandment to love requires a new way of living: regard for the other without counting the cost to ourselves. Jesus' death simultaneously reveals the full measure of our love for others and leads to a share in Jesus' glory. Love is the doorway to glory.

Jesus doesn't ask us anything that he himself hasn't already done to the fullest: the Good Friday-Easter events make clear the extent of Jesus' love for us-he will lay down his life so that we might have a share in his risen life. As disciples we are commanded to love as the Master loved; if our love is to imitate his, then our love must also include the willingness to lay down our life for others. The kind of love that Jesus commands leads to self-emptying dying to self.

Glory and love are promised to us-but we share in them only if we take up Jesus' mission. As the gospel says, Jesus was with the disciples only a little while longer; through our own self-sacrificing love we continue his mission of love whereby God is glorified. Loving one another, then, isn't just a nice idea shown in a flashback to a pleasant meal with friends and supporters. Loving one another is the very way we live.

Living the Paschal Mystery

The gospels tell us over and over in so many ways that love means self-sacrifice. We live the paschal mystery only when our own lives emulate the love of Jesus: giving one's all for the sake of one another. In many human ways we already do this and could think of no other way to act: most parents sacrifice plenty for their children, we readily response to others' tragedies with gifts of money and service, we reach out to the perfect stranger on the street who is in need. In so many ways we already act out of love that Jesus commands in this gospel. Perhaps this gospel flashback reminds us that we need only do the everyday things we are already doing with new meaning: we share in Jesus' mission when we love. On the other hand, if an examination of our lives suggests that perhaps we are not as self-sacrificing as Jesus, then this gospel is an invitation to love more completely. What is at stake is a share in Jesus' everlasting life and glory. This is worth loving for!

New Testament links

First Reading — Acts 14:21-27

²¹After they had proclaimed the good news to that city and made a considerable number of disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch. ²²They 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." ²³They appointed presbyters for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith.

²⁴Then they traveled through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia. ²⁵After proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia. ²⁶From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now accomplished. ²⁷And when they arrived, they called the church together and reported what God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Responsorial Reading – Psalm 145: 8-13

⁸The LORD is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and abounding in love. ⁹The LORD is good to all, compassionate to every creature. ¹⁰All your works give you thanks, O LORD and your faithful bless you. ¹¹ They speak of the glory of your reign and tell of your great works, ¹²Making known to all your power, the glorious splendor of your rule. ¹³Your reign is a reign for all ages, your dominion for all generations. The LORD is trustworthy in every word, and faithful in every work

Second Reading – Revelation 21:1-5

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³I 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). ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, (for) the old order has passed away." ⁵The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Then he said, "Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true."

Catechism of the Catholic Church

2196 In response to the question about the first of the commandments, Jesus says: "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The apostle St. Paul reminds us of this: "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

2842 This "as" is not unique in Jesus' teaching: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"; "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"; "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."(Mt 5:48; Lk 6:36; Jn 13:34.) It is impossible to keep the Lord's commandment by imitating the divine model from outside; there has to be a vital participation, coming from the depths of the heart, in the holiness and the mercy and the love of our God. Only the Spirit by whom we live can make "ours" the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. (Gal 5:25; Phil 2:1,5.) Then the unity of forgiveness becomes possible and we find ourselves "forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave" us. (Eph 4:32)

Sharing and Discussion

1. When the disciples looked back on Jesus' love for Judas, how do you think it clarified and magnified his command to love "as I have loved"?
2. Why do you think Jesus was concerned that people know that these disciples were his?
3. What should we do if our manifestation of love for another person is refused and rejected?

Closing Prayer

All: We pray that we can break down the barriers, and begin to love one another - enemy, friend or acquaintance. Lift the veil that covers our eyes and our hearts - that we might see all as your children. May the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with love, and our eyes with tears of joy. May we enfold all we meet today with your love, and may each meeting be as a meeting of oldest and dearest friends. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen

Saturday 10am - 12pm at Church of The Holy Cross (room #03-06)

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The Navarre Bible – Commentaries;

Living Liturgy – Liturgical Ministry, The Liturgical Press;

Emmaus Journey – www.emmausjourney.org