

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR C

Acts 14:21-27; Revelation 21:1-5a; John 13:31-33a, 34-35

(Excerpts from Pope Francis - Angelus - 19 May 2019)

by Father Charles Fillion

15 May 2022

Brothers and sisters, today's Gospel takes us back to Holy Thursday, to the Upper Room where Jesus gives his "farewell discourse" before his Passion. We hear him say: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another" (Jn 13:34). But in what sense does Jesus call this commandment "new"? In case you don't know, in the Old Testament (cf. Lev 19:18), the commandment already exists to love their neighbour as themselves. What then, is the novelty of this commandment? Why does Jesus call it a "new commandment"?

The *old* commandment of love became *new* because it was made complete with this addition: "*as I have loved you*". The novelty lies wholly in Jesus Christ's love, with which he gave his life for us. It is God's universal love, without any conditions or limits, which reaches its culmination on the cross. In that moment of extreme abasement, and in that moment of abandonment to the Father, the Son of God showed and gave to the world the fullness of love. Thinking back to Christ's passion and agony, the disciples understood the meaning of his words: "As I have loved you, you also should love one another".

Jesus loved us first. He loved us despite our frailties, our limitations and our human weaknesses. It was he who ensured we become worthy of his boundless and never-ending love. By giving us this new commandment, he asks us to love one another, not only and not so much with *our* love, but with *his*, which the Holy Spirit instills in our hearts if we invoke him with faith. In this way — and only in this way — can we love one another not only as we love ourselves but *as he* loved us, that is, infinitely more.

Indeed, God loves us much more than we love ourselves. And thus, we can spread everywhere the seed of love that renews relationships between people and opens horizons of hope. Jesus always opens horizons of hope. His love opens horizons of hope. This love makes us become new men and women, brothers and sisters in the Lord, and makes us the new People of God, that is the Church, in which everyone is called to love Christ and to love one another in him.

The love that was manifested in Christ's Cross and that he calls us to live is the only force that transforms our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh; the only force capable of transforming our heart is Jesus' love, if we too love with this love. And this love makes us capable of loving our enemies and forgiving those who have offended us.

I will ask you a question; each of you can respond in your heart. Am I capable of loving my enemies? You may say “I don’t have any enemies”. Well Pope Francis says otherwise. We all have people — whether ‘enemies’ I do not know — but who do not get along with us, who are on “the other side”; or some have people who have hurt them.... Am I capable of loving those people, that man, that woman who hurt me, who offended me? Am I capable of forgiving them? Each of you can respond in your heart. Yes, we hear of people who have forgiven their enemies, have killed their loved one, etc. Jesus’ love shows us the other as a present or future member of the community. It encourages us to dialogue and helps us to listen to one another and to mutually get to know each other.

This is what reconciliation is all about. When we talk about truth and reconciliation with the First Nations, it is not about one side of the story. Both sides have to learn to listen to the other’s story, without any interruption, without any judgment. But how can I listen with a spirit of mutual respect, trust, and equality to create possibility, responsibility and reconciliation, if I cannot reconcile MYSELF with MYSELF, before MYSELF with OTHERS, and MYSELF with Life?

Returning to Spirit is a workshop that empower individuals to reconcile their past in the present to transform the future. Some people will find it very difficult because they have so many baggage. They have too many wounds and have difficulty to move on. To begin healing, reconciliation begins with self. Yes, sometimes our enemy is ourselves. That is why it is important to find healing for ourselves before even trying to heal the other person. Only then an honest conversation, a true listening can happen and overall reconciliation between people from all different backgrounds can come together and heal in the process.

Love opens up toward the other, becoming the foundation of human relationships. It renders us capable of overcoming the barriers of our own weaknesses and biases. Jesus’ love within us creates bridges, teaches new paths, triggers the vitality of fraternity. With her maternal intercession, may the Virgin Mary help us to receive from her son Jesus the gift of his commandment, and from the Holy Spirit, the strength to put it into practice in everyday life.