

Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 19, 2019
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Homily

We always begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross. "+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." Today's Gospel reminds of us the cross: it too is a sign of the Cross. The first person mentioned is Judas. He would betray Jesus, and lead the temple guards to him in the Garden of Gethsemane; the first of the final steps that would end at Calvary. But Jesus begins his priestly prayer with mysterious words of glory. "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and God will glorify him at once." Five mentions of glory point to the divine dance of the persons of the Trinity: up here (↑) somewhere, elusive and veiled, caught up in the clouds, beyond our imagining, but filling our lives with hope. Then he lowers (↓) his gaze to those around him; he shifts his attention from heaven to earth. "My children, I will be with you only a little while longer." His time on earth was brief. Thirty-three years in the flesh - only half-way to retirement; three years in the public eye - less than a presidential term. His final day was ticking away. What could he leave them? "I give you a new commandment: love one another." Not looking up, not looking down, he looks from (→) side to side. His words complete the Sign of the Cross that I mentioned earlier. And loving one another can be like carrying a cross.

Acts 14:21-27
Ps 145
Rev 21:1-5a
Jn 13:31-33a, 34-35

It's a challenge with friends and family, and with our neighbours around us. But natural affection makes it easier: if you like someone, you might love them too. Mutual self-interest makes it easier: we lend a hand when we think that it will be returned. The dictates of reason make it easier: it's logical to love on account of shared humanity (St. Augustine, Office of Readings, 4th Thursday of Easter). But Jesus says "I give you a new commandment." What makes it "new?" A scholar had asked him, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest (Mt 22:36)?" Jesus told him to first love God, and second "You shall love your neighbour as yourself (Mt 22:39)." He was quoting an old commandment from Leviticus (Lev 19:18). Here's what makes it new. "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." He's telling them to love as he loves: with the love that he receives from the Father (1823); a supernatural love; patient and merciful; unlimited and unconditional. It's possible only with the help of Holy Spirit. Through him, we can believe in Jesus, we can receive his sacraments, we can keep the commandments that he gives us (2074). Through the Holy Spirit, we can forgive. Then Jesus is within us, loving God, and loving neighbour who is created in the image of God.

"This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The love given by the apostles bore witness to Jesus, and spread his Way throughout the world. The shadow of the cross falls on many lands: from Lystra to Lloyminster, Pisidia to Peterborough, Attalia to Ottawa; leading hearts and minds through wailing and pain to God and neighbour. It casts a shadow because it's lit by something brighter than the sun. Here are some words from a book called The Return of the King: "Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach." It's coming. At the end of the age, God will create "a new heaven and a new earth," and they will see "(↑) the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming (↓) down out of heaven from God." They will no longer cast their eyes upwards because God "(→) will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them."