**Homily for the Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year C**

**May 15, 2022**

**St. Bavo Parish**

**Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.**

*First Reading: Acts 14:21-27 (We must undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.)*

*Responsory: Psalm 145 (I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.)*

*Second Reading: Revelation 21:1-5a (Behold, I make all things new.)*

*Gospel: John 13:31-33a, 34-35 (Love one another as I have loved you.)*

We just heard the beginning of Jesus’ “Farewell Discourse” in the Gospel of John. The setting is the Last Supper. Judas, the betrayer, has just left to seek out the chief priests and arrange for Jesus to be arrested. Death is now imminent, and Jesus knows it. And so, he speaks to his disciples in the style of a father lying on his deathbed, giving his final instructions to his beloved children.

Strangely, Jesus does not express any sadness or trepidation with regard to his impending death. There is no Agony in the Garden in John’s Gospel. Jesus doesn’t need to wrestle with mixed emotions before deciding what to do when the soldiers come for him. He already knows what he will do, and he seems almost eager for these horrible events to unfold. Jesus is looking forward to his *glorification*: “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.” And, he’s not talking about his *resurrection*, but rather, his *crucifixion*. That’s why he adds that this glory will come *at once*, not three days later.

For John, Jesus’ *death on the cross* is the moment when both the Father and the Son are glorified. Jesus is glorified because he makes the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of others. The One who is unstained by sin voluntarily hands over his life to rescue all sinners from the punishment that they deserve. On the cross, Jesus completes the mission for which the Father sent him into the world. In death, his true identity as the Savior of the world is finally and gloriously revealed. At the same time, God the Father is glorified *in him*, for Jesus’ death also signifies *the Father’s sacrifice* of his beloved Son. Just as Jesus had the power to stop this gross miscarriage of justice from happening, so the Father also had the power to stop it and save his Son from suffering and death. But, both the Father and the Son chose to submit to this terrible evil in order to accomplish a truly glorious victory.

Jesus’ death on the cross also serves as the *principal moment of divine revelation*. It reveals Jesus’ true identity and the true nature of his messianic mission. But, even more than that, it reveals the unfathomable depth of *God’s love* for the whole human race. The Father so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for our salvation. The Son so loved the world that he gave up his life for us. Both of those loves are beautifully expressed in the one image of our crucified Lord. That’s why the crucifix remains such a powerful symbol for all of us Christians.

Keep in mind that as Jesus speaks cryptically about his “glorification,” his disciples have no idea that he’s actually alluding to his own death. They don’t know why Judas left the supper and went out into the night. They don’t know that Jesus will be arrested that very night and executed the next day. Jesus gives them another hint by saying, “My children, I will be with you only a little while longer.” But, that could mean anything. The disciples still cannot comprehend, at this point, that the Messiah will enter into his glory by suffering and dying.

Then Jesus gives them a new commandment, his parting wish for all of them to obey: “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.” We can imagine the thoughts that must have come into the disciples minds upon hearing this commandment. They would have pondered all the different ways that Jesus had demonstrated his love for them – through his patient instruction, his gentle guidance, his constant encouragement... Every disciple wants to be like his master. So, from the beginning, they surely would have aspired to become as loving to others as Jesus had been to them. However, Jesus had not yet shown them the full depth of his love. That would be revealed on the cross. Then, his “new commandment” would have to be reinterpreted in light of the crucifixion. To “love one another as I have loved you” means to go beyond imitating Jesus’ loving deeds during the course of his ministry and to give over our lives for the sake of others, as he did on the cross.

Though they did not know it at the time, Jesus was commanding his disciples to rise above all the forms of human love which they had ever experienced and aspire to a *divine love* that the world had never seen before. It is a *perfect* love, which holds nothing back, and which seeks only the good of others, regardless of the personal cost. That is an impossibly high standard to reach, yet it is the goal that Jesus set before his disciples. We, too, are called to aim just as high in our dealings with one another. Just being good and kind to one another is not sufficient. Loving others as they have loved us is not sufficient. The Lord’s commandment is to love others as *he* has loved us… *on the cross*! I dare say that none of us is capable of achieving that goal. The question is, how many of us are even willing to *try*?

Paul and Barnabas, as they traveled around to young Christian communities in Galatia, exhorted the believers to persevere in faith, saying: “It is necessary to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” Sometimes those hardships come from outside ourselves, in the form of persecutions, misunderstandings, slander, etc. But, many of the greatest hardships that we must undergo come from within ourselves. Our pride, our laziness, our selfishness, and any number of other personal faults afflict us much more frequently than any adversaries. These inner hardships are the most serious barriers to love. They not only inhibit us from achieving the perfect love that Jesus asks from us, but, even worse, they make us doubt whether such love is even possible, apart from Jesus himself.

Fortunately, we have many saints throughout the centuries who have shown us how to love *nearly* as perfectly as Jesus. Some of them took a whole lifetime to approach that lofty goal, but all of them persevered, undergoing many hardships and obstacles along the way, because they believed that the goal was worth pursuing with every fiber of their being. We also need to be so motivated, and so filled with hope, that we may put out a similar effort, and never give in to discouragement or despair. We know that we’re going to fall short, again and again. Even so, we can still gaze upon a crucifix each day and say with conviction, “I want to learn how to love *like that*.”