

5th Sunday of Easter (C)
(Revelation 21:1-5 / John 13:31-35)
24.04.2016
New

Psychologists tell us that the introduction of novelty into one's field of view commands what they call an orienting response. In clear, animals and human beings always turn their faces and eyes toward the new thing. Our consumerist society knows this fact and uses it in order to make us buy the new iPhone, the improved cleaning product, with new scent and a new formula.

The task of all those who are responsible for marketing strategies is to lead us to believe that our longing for newness will be – is – satisfied by the new product on the market. They can go as far as the Irish chocolate brand which describes itself as “purveyor of happiness”.

It is true that we are made for life, and life is about change, growth and newness. However we all know that to comply with the marketing mentality of our society does not bring us the happiness and peace we long for.

The challenge may be for us to realise that newness is not always where we think it is. The great prophets of the Old Testament promised a profound renewal of creation and humanity. Yes, they prophesied that we would “sing a new song to the Lord” (Is 42:10), that we would “be called by a new name” (Is 62:2), and that the Lord would make “a new covenant” with his people (Jer 31:31). But all these things have the potential to bear fruit only insofar as they are rooted in a deep and complete renewal of our hearts and of our very lives. And here lies the problem of our marketing society, its philosophy is based on changing things outside ourselves. Our God knows where to begin: in our hearts. And so the new song, the new name, the new covenant are rooted in the gift of “a new heart and a new spirit” (Ez 36:26).

All this finds its accomplishment in Jesus Christ. In him, we are a “new creation” (2Co 5:17).

Moreover because we believe that “God's love has been poured into our hearts” (Rm 5:5), the commandment of love is no longer only a written law inscribed on a tablet of stone, a law imposed on us from outside, but it is God himself dwelling within us. When we act with love, as Christians, we not only act ethically, but we allow God's love and life to overflow from our hearts to transform the world around us.

From that perspective, the new heaven and the new earth promised in our reading from the book of Revelation begin within us. Each time we choose love as the compelling motive for all that we do and say, God's new creation grow in us and around us.

St Irenaeus believed that “Jesus brought all possible novelty by bringing himself” (*Adv Haer.* IV, 34, 1). We do not need to cling to what is old, we have no reason to be afraid: newness is what we long for and it is given to us by Jesus Christ. The amazing thing is that Jesus does not only bring novelty and life but he plants within our hearts the seeds of imperishable and renewed life so that we can, in our turn, become agents of renewal and life in our world.

At a certain level it is normal to be thrilled and enthusiastic when we are buying something new or when we are meeting new people. However none of these are “purveyors

of happiness". The Good News we have to share with the world is that our deep longing for newness, renewal and happiness is Christ within us.

Our lives and our world will be renewed only if we live from our hearts where the new commandment of love is engraved.

The real purveyor of happiness is God within us who can make all things new when we live according to the new commandment of love.

All this may sound a bit ethereal, nice indeed but not really useful in a world which is going through many crises, driven by many fears.

And yet as Christians, we should believe that love is stronger than death, wiser than all human wisdom. If we want to be clear about our Christian identity and if we want to deal properly with the problems of our world we have to believe that we are better equipped with the new tools of dialogue, selflessness, respect, patience, solidarity, generosity and forgiveness than with the old tools of suspicion, violence, self-centredness, vengeance and resentment.

As we search for solutions to the present migrant crisis, as we try to discern how to vote in the forthcoming election or referendum, as we consider the best way to relate to one another in families and communities, as we acknowledge our desire for happiness, are we going to choose the way of sin which makes us and our world grow old or the new way of love? Are we going to build walls and moats or are we going to create bridges? By our political decisions and our religious attitudes, do we secure the old enclosed fortress or do we participate in the coming of the new city?

We do not need to turn our eyes frantically towards all the new things that our world presents or to cling fearfully to the old ways which reassure us. God's love is timeless and for ever new. Like the small mustard seed which gives a great tree, God's love is sown in our hearts to accomplish marvels.

The new heaven and the new earth, where sadness, tears, mourning, divisions, rejection, hatred and violence are defeated begin within each one of us, the new heaven and the new earth begin each time we choose to act and speak with love.

During this Easter season, we are supposed to leave behind in the tomb of Jesus Christ all that is old. Let us walk confidently on the new path of love and life as heralds of a new day which has no end.