

5th Sunday of Easter (C)
(Acts 14:21-27 / John 13:31-33. 34-35)
15.05.2022

Dear brothers and sisters,

“I give you a new commandment:
love one another;
just as I have loved you, you also must love one another.
By this love you have for one another,
everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

This is Jesus’ solemn legacy, his last will and testament. He speaks these words just before entering into his passion and death. We should treasure these words in the way we treasure the last words of a loved one who has just passed away, trying to understand their true meaning.

“Love one another” is not a new commandment. We find these words already in the Old Testament. In the book of Leviticus (19:18), we read: “You will not exact vengeance on, or bear any sort of grudge against, the members of your race, but will love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.” And yet Jesus’ commandment is new because he sets the standard so high by telling his disciples to love one another as He himself loved them. The new commandment is not to love one another, but to love one another as Jesus loved when on earth, to the end.

What does Jesus mean when he asks us to love as he loved us?

Jesus loved selflessly.

When we love, does it not happen that we think of what we shall get out of our love? We think of the happiness we shall receive or on the contrary of the loneliness we shall suffer if love fails or is denied. If we are honest, we have to confess that sometimes, when we love, it is our happiness that we are seeking and not the happiness of the one we love. When Jesus loved his disciples, he never thought of himself. His one desire was to give himself and all he had for those he loved. To love as Jesus loved us is to put the other and not ourselves first and at the centre of the picture.

To love was not always easy for Jesus. Suffering was an inevitable part of the process. Love led Jesus to meet with scorn, misunderstanding, hatred, unjust violence, and finally with his passion and his death on the Cross. The same kind of experience can be ours when we try to love our neighbour as Jesus loved us. What is interesting to note is the way Jesus used to react when he found himself in these situations of opposition. Jesus always turned these painful situations into further expressions of love. There where we would be inclined to pay back eye for eye, or tooth for tooth, Jesus excelled in turning hatred into love, anger into graciousness, envy into blessing, bitterness into warmth, pettiness into compassion, chaos into peace, sin into forgiveness. Let us think of Jesus’ compassion and the pardon he showed to Peter who had betrayed Him, or Jesus’ prayer for the forgiveness of those who were crucifying Him: “Father, forgive them”. We are called to do the same and it is not easy. This is to love our neighbour as Jesus loved us; and this is the way to life.

Jesus loved his disciples as they were and not as he wanted them to be. Sometimes, we would like others to be like us, to think like us, to speak like us. This is not respectful of others, of their identity, of their uniqueness in God's sight.

It has been said that we never really know people until we have lived with them. When we meet with them only occasionally, we see them at their best. It is when we live with them that we discover their moods, their irritabilities and their weaknesses.

Jesus knew his disciples. He had lived with them day in and day out for many months and years; he knew them, he knew their limits and their weaknesses, and He still loved them. Jesus' heart was big enough to love his disciples as they were. He loves us as we are. Our heart has to become big enough to love others as they are. This is easily said; it is less easily put into practice. It is however the only way to love our neighbour as Jesus loved his disciples.

Forgiveness was the mark of Jesus' love for his disciple. Peter, the leader of the disciples, was to deny ever knowing his Master. Like Peter, all the other disciples were also to abandon their Master during his passion, at the moment he would have needed them most. We have a mysterious tendency to hurt most of all those who love us best. But Jesus held nothing against his unfaithful disciples. There was no failure which He could not forgive. All enduring love must be built on forgiveness. Love which has not learned to forgive is bound to die.

Let us ask the Risen Lord to teach us how to love. He loved all those he met warmly and openly. May he grant us the grace and the courage to do the same: to love as he loved us!