

Sunday May 2nd, 2021

Fifth Sunday of Easter Parishioner Reflection

By: Jim McDonald

In today's readings, we hear the Beloved Disciple exhorting the believers to love one another, just as Jesus commanded at the Last Supper; "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:34

Psalm 22 speaks of the suffering of God's Anointed but ends with praise of God's Mercy. Psalm 22: 25 says "From you comes my praise in the great congregation..." and in verse 27, "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord and all the families of the nations shall worship before you."

What does the Psalmist mean when he says "From you comes my praise..." and "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord...". The Gospel reading contains the answer and the second reading from 1 John 3: 18-24 explains. We are to love "... not in word or speech, but in truth and action". Just prior to this, in verses 16-17, we read, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?".

Our love for one another in truth and action draws others to the Lord in fulfillment of Psalm 22. Our present culture is rife with news that is short on truth and substance, and social media has reduced communication to short bites of 250 characters or less. Words are cheap and opinions vary as widely as the weather. Sacred scripture is Truth and Life and has the power to transform the believer. "The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord!" Psalm 22: 26. This transformation must lead to action, to love one another. This love will attract others to the Word who is Jesus. This is not our doing but is rather the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us. Hence the recognition that "From you comes my praise in the great congregation...".

In the Gospel reading, Jesus tells us to "Abide in me as I abide in you." Jesus abides in us through Baptism and Confirmation and the gift of his Body and Blood in Holy Eucharist. And yet, when we fail to love God and others, Jesus is there to forgive us and to help us start again. "Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit." Pruning involves cutting away those tendencies in us to stray from God and his commandment to love one another. It can be painful and sometimes we do not see the purpose of our suffering or the suffering of those we love, within our own families or in the world. But Jesus is the Master Gardener and we can be certain that our suffering or

the suffering of those we love is in accordance with His good purpose. For our part, we must persevere to the end, praying and interceding constantly and trusting in God's Mercy, just as Jesus did in his Passion and was rewarded by the Father for his obedience. We must strive to love one another as He commanded, confident that Jesus is with us, pruning and nurturing, "because apart from me, you can do nothing."

And this love bears fruit to the glory of God the Father, as we see in the life of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles. Despite living in a time that was openly hostile to the gospel (not unlike our own times), the early Church continued to grow in numbers and lived in peace, the peace of Christ. Not everyone accepted (or accepts) the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. But even now, God is patient and ever faithful to his promise of forgiveness and new life for everyone. I am certain that, then as now, some of those who initially reject the Good News eventually have a change of heart and turn back to God. Just think of St. Augustine to name one! If the Church had not persevered in faith and love and St. Monica had not persevered in prayer, St. Augustine and many others might not have come to believe. Heaven rejoices in the conversion of every sinner.

And so, we must trust in God's love since we cannot see beyond our present. With each passing moment, Jesus is guiding his Church on earth. He is the Good Shepherd. If we strive to know Jesus and to love one another, we abide in Him and He abides in us. And if we love one another, whatever we ask of Him out of love will be done for us.

In the words of Michael Perry (1942–1996), which he wrote in 1982 for the melody THAXTED (Gustav Holst (1874-1934)) :

"Oh God Beyond All Praising,

We worship you today and sing the love amazing that songs cannot repay;

For we can only wonder at every gift you send,

At blessings without number and mercies without end;

We lift our hearts before you and wait upon your word,

We honour and adore you, our great and mighty Lord."

May the Peace of Christ be with you!