

Weekend Readings & Reflections

May 14-15, 2022: Fifth Sunday of Easter

Reflection: By God's goodness and compassion, the doors of His kingdom have been opened to all who have faith, Jew or Gentile. That's the good news Paul and Barnabas proclaim in today's First Reading. With the coming of the Church—the new Jerusalem John sees in today's Second Reading—God is “making all things new.” In His Church, the “old order” of death is passing away and God for all time is making His dwelling with the human race, so that all peoples “will be His people and God Himself will always be with them.” In this the promises made through His prophets are accomplished (see Ezekiel 37:27; Isaiah 25:8; 35:10). The Church is “the kingdom for all ages” that we sing of in today's Psalm. That's why we see the Apostles, under the guidance of the Spirit, ordaining “presbyters” or priests (see 1 Timothy 4:14; Titus 1:5). Anointed priests and bishops will be the Apostles' successors, ensuring that the Church's “dominion endures through all generations” (see Philippians 1:1, note that the New American Bible translates *episcopos*, the Greek word for bishops, as “overseers”). Until the end of time, the Church will declare to the world God's mighty deeds, blessing His holy name and giving Him thanks, singing of the glories of His kingdom. In His Church, we know ourselves as His “faithful ones,” as those Jesus calls “My little children” in today's Gospel. We live by the new law, the “new commandment” that He gave in His final hours. The love He commands of us is no human love but a supernatural love. We love each other as Jesus loved us in suffering and dying for us. We love in imitation of His love. This kind of love is only made possible by the Spirit poured into our hearts at Baptism (see Romans 5:5), renewed in the sacrifice His priests offer in every Mass. By our love we glorify the Father. And by our love all peoples will know that we are His people, that He is our God.

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome to our discussion for the fifth Sunday of Easter:

All: Behold me, my beloved Jesus, weighed down under the burden of my trials and sufferings, I cast myself at your feet, that you may renew my strength and my courage, while I rest here in your Presence. Permit me to lay down my cross in your Sacred Heart, for only your infinite goodness can sustain me; only your love can help me bear my cross; only your powerful hand can lighten its weight. O Divine King, Jesus, whose heart is so compassionate to the afflicted, I wish to live in you; suffer and die in you. During my life be to me my model and my support; At the hour of my death, be my hope and my refuge. Amen. (From <http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=873>)

Leader: Our theme today is “Embracing the Cross.” We will see that the Gospel reading challenges us to look at difficulties and annoyances in our lives not simply as obstacles, but as opportunities—opportunities for growth. Just as Jesus is glorified through his acceptance of the cross, so we are called to be transformed through the trials and difficulties we face every day. Let's ask the Lord to help us be open to seeing the difficulties in our lives in a new light as we watch today's video.

Play the video on FORMED.org: [Opening the Word – 5th Sunday of Easter \(Year C\)](#)

Digging Deeper

The Transforming Power of Suffering

“Those who share in Christ's sufferings have before their eyes the paschal mystery of the Cross and Resurrection, in which Christ descends, in a first phase, to the ultimate limits of human weakness and impotence: indeed, he dies nailed to the cross. But if at the same time in this weakness there is accomplished his lifting up, confirmed by the power of the Resurrection, then this means that the weaknesses of all human sufferings are capable of being infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ's cross. In such a concept, to suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open to the working of the salvific powers of God, offered to humanity in Christ.” —Pope St. John Paul I

FIRST READING ~ Acts 14:21-27 ~

After Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed the good news to that city and made a considerable number of disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch. They strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying, “It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” They appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith. Then they traveled through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia. After proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now accomplished. And when they arrived, they called the church together and reported what God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas traveled great distances, endured resistance and persecution and spent years away from their ‘home base’ of Antioch. On finishing their ‘journey’ they returned back through the various towns - even those that persecuted them!

- *What does this teach you about Paul and Barnabas? What would ‘their’ missionary journey look like in ‘your’ world, office or workplace?*

Paul and Barnabas broke centuries old prejudices of considering God only loved ‘the Jews’. His ‘chosen’.

Going to the Gentiles was an enormous change. To put this into context, if a Jew married a Gentile in Jesus’ time the Jewish family would conduct a public funeral to say to everyone that you were now ‘dead’ to the family. Gentiles were considered ‘intrinsically unclean’. Strict Jews believed they were ‘defiled’ by being with Gentiles.

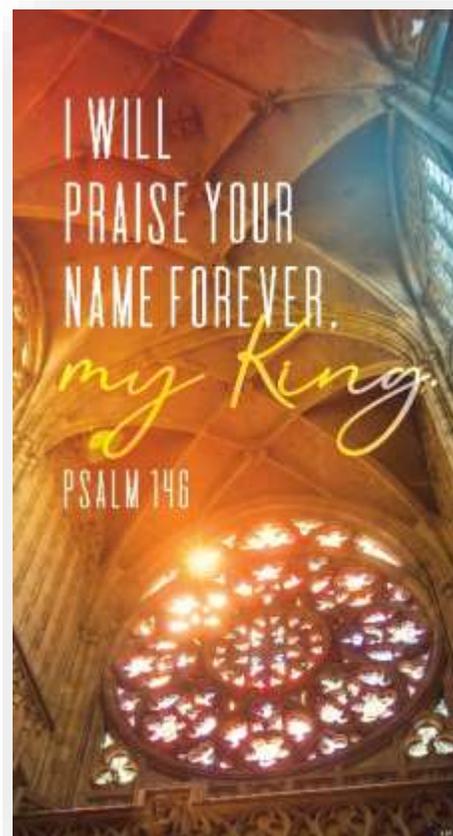
- *Which group of people today are considered ‘outcasts’, ‘sinners’, beyond God’s love? Could you be a missionary to them? What might need to change in you? In the Church?*

SECOND READING ~ Revelations 21:1-5a ~

Then I, John, saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.” The One who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.”

The Book of Revelation gives us the final seventh vision. Although Jerusalem had been destroyed and Christians were being severely persecuted a vision is seen of what will come true.

- *Can you look at the Church today - in its current struggles - and see the bride (church) adorned for her husband (Christ) and God’s presence ever-dwelling in the Church in the Eucharist and the Word?*



GOSPEL ~ John 13:31-33a, 34-35 ~

When Judas had left them, Jesus said, “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. My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

In John's gospel the moment of Jesus dying on the cross is not simply a place of suffering. The word Glory is used 5 times in today's gospel. It is Jesus being 'lifted up' like a winning coach on the shoulders of the winning sports team. It is a moment of victory. Glorious!

- *When you look at the cross, do you see only suffering? Can you see why it is also 'glorious'?*
Jesus gives a commandment to his disciples which is 'new'. While the Old Testament encouraged Jews to 'love' their neighbour, it was interpreted within the boundaries of your 'inner circle' of family. Jesus tells his disciples the love his followers are to show is to be qualitatively different. A self-sacrificing love to all like his own love on the cross. A love to 'outsiders' not simply 'insiders'.
- *Would people see in your lifestyle and 'love' style something different? Can you identify a lived action where you lived and showed Christ recently?*



MEDITATION

How does God reveal his glory to us? During his last supper with his disciples on the eve of his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus speaks of his glory and the glory of his Father. What is this glory? It is the cross which Jesus speaks of here. The cross of Jesus reveals the tremendous love and mercy of God the Father and his beloved Son for the human race. John the Evangelist writes, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

There is no greater glory and honor that one can offer than the willing sacrifice of one's life for the sake of another. This is the true nature of love - the total self-giving and free offering of one's life for the good of another. A mother who loves her child will do everything in her power to nurture, protect, and save the life of the child. A soldier devoted to his country's welfare, will endure any hardship and suffering and willingly sacrifice his own life to defend his people. God the Father showed the unfathomable depth of his love and mercy by willingly offering his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world. To ransom a slave God gave his only Son. That slave is you and me and the whole human race which is bound in sin and death and separation from God.

Paul the Apostle tells us, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). The Lord Jesus died for our sins to bring us abundant new life in his Spirit and to restore our nature in the true image and likeness of God. The cancer of sin shows us the ugliness of greed, hatred, and envy which

destroy the very core of our being and rob us of life and love. That is why evil infects the world which God created out of his boundless love and goodness. God did not create evil and suffering, but through suffering he conquers evil with goodness, truth, and mercy and righteousness.

That is why Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment and way of love - not a commandment that replaces the Old Covenant commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself. This new commandment transforms the old commandment with the love and mercy which the Lord Jesus poured out for us on the Cross of Calvary. There death was defeated, and sin was covered with merciful love and forgiveness, and Satan's power was crushed through Godly meekness and obedience. Jesus proved that love is stronger than death. That is how we overcome the world and conquer our enemies - Satan, who is the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning, the world which stands in opposition to God, and our own sinful pride and fear of death.

The Father has glorified his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, by raising him from the dead. And the Lord shares his glory with us and with all who believe in him as their Lord and Savior. Augustine of Hippo wrote, *God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love*. God's love is direct, personal, and wholly oriented to our good welfare and happiness.

This is the power that overcomes the world - the triumphant cross of Christ which breaks the destructive forces of sin, hatred, and division. And we share in the power of Christ's victory by embracing the cross which the Lord Jesus sets before each one of us. When my will crosses with God's will, then his will must be done. The cross of Christ sets us free to live no longer for ourselves but for Christ and his kingdom of peace, joy, and righteousness (moral goodness). Our calling and privilege is to serve as Christ has served and to love and he has loved. That is the way we share in the glory of our heavenly Father who gave us his beloved Son who laid down his life for each one of us.

- *What can hold us back from loving the One who suffered and died for us and who offers us abundant joy and happiness with him forever?*
- *How can we love one another as Christ has loved us?*
- *What is the cross that I must take up daily in order to follow the Lord Jesus?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing let us now pray together:

ALL: Lord Jesus, your love knows no bounds and surpasses everything I could desire and long for. Fill me with the fire of your love and with the joy of your Holy Spirit that I may freely serve my neighbor with loving-kindness, tenderhearted mercy, and generous care for their well-being. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

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