

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

Principal Service readings

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| Acts 11.1-18 | The Holy Spirit falls on Gentile believers |
| Psalm 148 [or 148.1-6] | Praise God, heaven and earth |
| Revelation 21.1-6 | The heavenly Jerusalem |
| John 13.31-35 | The new commandment: to love one another |

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The new commandment: to love one another

³¹During the supper, when Judas had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, “Where I am going, you cannot come.” ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’

John 13.31-35 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Jesus has just shared an intimate gesture with Judas, his betrayer (13.26). *After* this, Satan enters into Judas (13.27). It is difficult to countenance Judas sharing in the eucharistic meal, even though it shows Jesus’ unending love. Judas leaves the gathering and this leads to a ‘shout of triumph’ by Jesus. Jesus is proclaiming that now ‘the hour has come’. Jesus continues to care for his disciples, calling them ‘little children’

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

(13.33). Jesus has already told ‘the Jews’, ‘where I am going you cannot come’ (13.33, cf. 7.34); unfortunately, the disciples share their ignorance. He gives them a ‘new commandment’ (13.34) that matches the gift of his example (13.15). Jesus is asking his disciples to follow him in loving self-giving. The unique quality of this love will show to everyone the connection between Jesus and his disciples (13.35).

Quotations

1

The Cross is not simply a lovely example of sacrificial love. Throwing your life away needlessly is not admirable — it is wrong. Jesus’ death was only a good example if it was more than an example, if it was something absolutely necessary to rescue us. And it was. Why did Jesus have to die in order to forgive us? There was a debt to be paid — God himself paid it. There was a penalty to be born — God himself bore it. Forgiveness is always a form of costly suffering.

Timothy Keller, 1950–

2

Jesus doesn’t say, “The religion founded in my name is the way, the truth, and the life, [and] what people say about me is the way.” “Our way of worship, the Christian structure, is not the way,” [he would say,] “I am. I am. If you want to know what life is all about, what it’s supposed to be, where it’s supposed to go, where it’s supposed to derive its strength from, don’t look at anything people say about me. Don’t look at the faith that’s been created. Look at my life, which is a life ultimately of sacrificial love.”

Frederick Buechner, 1926–

3

I encourage all of you to discover ever more fully in the Eucharist, the sacrament of Christ’s sacrificial love, the inspiration and strength needed to work ever more generously for the spread of God’s Kingdom and the growth of the civilization of love.

Pope Benedict XVI, 1927–

Related topics

For further study:

The two great commandments/law of love; paschal mystery/death/resurrection; mystery of the church; Christian witness; sacraments; baptism; confirmation; eucharist; penance; symbols: water, light, oil, bread, wine, cross, white garment; laying on of hands

Closing Prayer

<text> We behold your glory, O God,
in the love shown by your Son,
lifted up on the cross
and exalted on high.

Increase our love for one another,
that both in name and in truth
we may be disciples of the risen Lord Jesus,
and so reflect by our lives
the glory that is yours.

Grant this through Jesus Christ, the first-born from the dead,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · Easter 5C²

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2 *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*