

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Year C

Acts 14:21-27

Ps 145:8-9, 10-11, 12-13

Rev 21:1-5a

Jn 13:31-33a, 34-35

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This passage in John's gospel is often referred to as Jesus' farewell discourse. Jesus has an appreciation of the end of his earthly life approaching, and with a sense of urgency is offering some parting words about what He thinks is most important for us to remember.

There is indeed something about us, within us, when we begin to sense that our time is running out, that prompts us to want to sum up just who we are succinctly and honestly. Often people will speak from the heart in the hope that they and their words will be remembered long after they have departed. The long time employee addressing the company on the night of the retirement dinner...The boyfriend to the girlfriend the day they broke up...The soldier to his or her family just before deployment...Friend to friend on graduation day...There are certain threshold moments in life when we are acutely aware that things may never be the same again, and we want the others to know what we believe to be the truth.

I happened to be working in one of our Augustinian parishes in New York City on September 11, 2001, and found myself side by side with so many people who were forced to say farewell to friends and loved ones long before they ever expected to. In this age of sophisticated technology, I am sure it was striking for all of us to hear the many cell phone messages and voice mails from those people in the towers who sensed their time on this earth was coming to a close. While it was touching to hear what certain individuals had to say, it was equally revealing what they did not say. In those final moments, no one left a message that said: "You know I really wish that I had gotten an 'A' in Managerial Accounting." No one was heard saying, "I should have bought the Benz." No, in those final moments, when many were all too aware of the reality of the circumstances that they were facing, we heard things like: "I love you." "If I ever hurt you, I'm sorry." "Tell the children that I love them."

These were true farewell discourses and will be remembered forever by those who heard those words. In today's gospel, Jesus addresses His friends one last time and says: "My time of glorification has come." "If you were ever to hear my voice, hear it now." He wants his disciples to get it straight, and to remember what it all boils down to: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you should also love one another." It is not quite enough to love as WE love, but to love as "He" loves.

Jesus loved even when He was tired. Jesus loved even when He was overworked. Jesus loved even when they didn't love Him back. Jesus loved through betrayal. Jesus loved those who disagreed with Him. Jesus loved those who were different from Him. Jesus loves even when WE don't love Him back. To love this way is hard. To love this way is painful. To love this way will feel like we are dying, and yet that is what we are

called to do. Yet, it was loving this way that took Jesus right through the cross to the resurrection. It is no wonder that He wanted us to remember this, and live the same way he did. St. Paul says if we die with Christ we rise with Christ.

Maybe we don't yet feel that sense of urgency, but make no mistake about it, from the moment of our baptism we all have been dying. To live and love like Jesus showed us will indeed feel like we are dying, but it will affect how we are living today and through eternity. Saint Augustine noted, "Love is possible at any time, but it is proven in times of trial."

As we come to the table of the Lord to receive His body and blood, may we receive the grace and strength to live and love the way He has asked us to. He has shown us the way. He has offered the pathway to peace, and now He leaves us the voice mail he wants us never to forget: "I Love you...Love one another... Do this in memory of me."