

Homily For the 5th Sunday of Easter- Year C

St Peter's Saturday Masses- May 18, 2019

Acts 14: 21-27 "They related all God had done with them, how he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles."

Psalm 145 "I will bless your name forever, my king and my God."

Revelation 21: 1-5 "The one who was seated on the throne said: See, I am making all things new."

John 13: 1,31-35 "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

I Make All Things New

Introduction

I was an older student at university, where the others were no more than 20 years old. One day a young student was wearing a T-shirt with an image from one of the record albums of the Beatles, the most famous 60s and 70s pop music group. They were my favourite band as a teenager, so I told her I had gone to a Beatles concert at Maple Leaf Gardens back in the day. I thought the response might be "Boy are you old." But, instead, her look of awe was quite noticeable. "You were there? What was it like?" She was a fan and wanted to know everything about it from someone who had actually been there in person.

Well, having the Apostle John in your community, like they had at Ephesus, was like that only much more important. It beats being at a Beatles concert, because John didn't just go to a 'Jesus concert'. He spent three years and hundreds of hours learning from the Lord's own lips, watching him heal people, lift people up from the depths of despair, while putting the proud and arrogant in their place. John was sitting right next to Jesus at the Last Supper. He's the one who asked the question, "Lord, who is it who is going to betray you?"

It was about 50 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. All the other Apostles had been martyred, killed for their faith in Jesus. But there was John, still alive. Can you imagine? The Church at Ephesus, in modern day Turkey, was a very exciting place. It was alive with the love and worship of the Lord of Hosts, the Lamb of God, Jesus the Saviour. But, no one there had ever *met* Jesus in the flesh except John, the youngest of the Apostles. And they had *him* as their Bishop. Until

she died, Mary was right there too because Jesus had asked John, from the cross, to take care of his mother. What a church that must have been! Even more exciting than St. Peter's, if you can imagine.

Love One Another

They would have heard from John's own lips what we read over and over again in John's letters and in today's gospel passage: "My little children, love one another." He had never forgotten what Jesus said before he was to go to his death. Oh, he would have told them other things, like how they were out on the water and a storm came up and how those brave grown men were literally crying with fear that they were going to die, but Jesus saved them. He would have told them about how bread and fish to feed five thousand people somehow came from one small boy's lunch after Jesus blessed it.

But, as John got older, the things he said about Jesus probably got more and more simple. Who knows, as he got very old, maybe John was experiencing dementia. Maybe he started to forget where he put his wallet or the keys to his chariot. But he never forgot what Jesus had said near the end of his life, and he repeated it often. You know it: "Little children, love one another as I have loved you."

At this point, we need to remind ourselves that love, for Jesus and for John, is not an emotion, a sentiment, or personal attraction - I love ice cream. It's practical, dynamic and it's demanding. It takes the willingness to sacrifice for someone. Jesus himself is the revelation of God's love in his ministry and in his death. "No one takes my life from me", he said, "I lay down my life for my friends."

John Imprisoned

Now the dark cloud hanging over all the Christian churches at that time after Jesus' life was that there was an order from the Roman Emperor to persecute them. There was a kind of ban on Christian worship. However, the governor of Ephesus just wanted peace and was not enforcing that law, so the Church there was thriving.

But then a new governor came to Ephesus, and he decided to enforce the requirement that everyone should make some sign of worship to the Emperor. He knew the Christians wouldn't do that because they believed this Jesus Christ was the real Son of God, not the Emperor. So the soldiers marched in to the church one Sunday, hauled the priests out and killed them with swords in front of everyone there. Then they said to everyone else, "Worship Caesar or lose everything you have."

There is a legend that they tried to kill John by dropping him into boiling oil, but he was miraculously protected. What we do know for sure is that they sent him to the prison island called Patmos. That was their version of Alcatraz. There, an old man named John, the last of the original Apostles to Jesus, was made to do hard labour under the hot sun.

Can you imagine how sad he would have been? He just saw his beloved Christian church at Ephesus, where he had brought Jesus' mother, destroyed and the priests killed. I'm guessing it would be reasonable to think of him getting pretty sad, maybe even severely depressed. Was this the end of the Church? Was there never to be a Sunday Eucharist ever again?

God's answer was to show John what was going to happen. He give him a vision right into heaven. He showed him that there was no need to be sad or afraid, because good would win over evil. It wouldn't even be close. God told him to write it all down so people would know that, no matter what happens on earth, no matter how bad things look at times, God will accomplish his plan to save us from our sin, from the sin of the world, no matter how hard things sometimes are right now.

Acts

That's also what kept Saint Paul going. He suffered many trials, it tells us. He walked many thousands of kilometers. He probably wore out a few Fit Bit watches, walking throughout the Roman Empire to tell people about this Jesus who had conquered death by *his* death and resurrection, and that believing in him would transform his followers from people who felt defeated by the trials of

life, into a people who would be filled with joy just knowing that God had a plan for them, that their lives are full of purpose.

It isn't easy to hear today what Paul told them in his day. It is **by** your persecutions and trials that you are going to enter that kingdom of heaven, where every tear will be wiped away. There was a great need for strength and encouragement where Paul was, just as there was where John was. But Paul knew what we need to know, that our suffering is not wasted, if we turn it over to God. It's not by ease that we enter the Kingdom of God. It's by trials.

On Heaven

You know, today people think that, if there is a heaven, it will be so boring, sitting around singing the same old hymns, and that in hell there will be a party going on all the time. I'm here today to assure you that nothing could be further from the truth. It's one of the biggest lies of all. In hell are only those who have rejected the idea of loving one another. Do you realize what that means? No one you can trust. No one who gives a darn about anyone. No one who would be willing to sacrifice anything for love.

John was given a vision into heaven where the saints and angels - all the heavenly host - are singing for joy. They can't help themselves. They are in the continuous presence of the Lamb of God. They know that they have been made free, and they are so full of joy that they want to be there praising God all the time.

Call to Action

Now is the time ask if there is joy in your life. Perhaps circumstances have conspired against you. Perhaps relationships have not worked out. Perhaps you have suffered a great loss. Perhaps you don't even know why you have a vague emptiness or longing within you.

Jesus declares, behold I make all things new. In fact, he is in the process of making all things new right now, even in the circumstances of our lives, if we will let him. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes.