

Homily For Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - May 20, 2022

Acts 15:22-31 "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden"

Psalm 57:7-11 "I will give thanks to you among the peoples."

John 15:12-17 "I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

Commanded To Love

Introduction

Baby boomers lost something really important in all the excitement of the revolution against moral authority. That was the rebellion against the ordinary limits which the Christian faith held up to keep behaviours in line with God's plan to bless the nations of the world and all peoples. Sadly, we have not gotten it back. On behalf of all boomers, I am terribly sorry about that. For that, I apologize to you. It continues to break my heart that, like my generation, I did not know what we were giving up as we rushed headlong into this new so called freedom.

My parents generation of Catholics were probably the last generation to take the obligation to attend mass seriously. Possibly there are some here who remember those days. I swear to you that, if you asked a Catholic from that generation: Have you ever missed mass in your life? They would be able to count on one hand, the number of times. Not only that, but there would be a long dramatic story behind each one that they would be ready to share: Well, we were on vacation and we knew where all the churches were and what time masses were. We got in the car with all the kids and set out with lots of time to spare, but then the car engine blew up, so me and the wife got out and pushed the car for ten miles, but then there was a flood, so we all got out and swam across where the bridge was washed out. But when we got to mass, the church had burned down and the priest was in hospital. We walked to the next province but the time had changed and mass was over, and then it was midnight. The next day, we all went to confession.

Not every story would have been that dramatic, but the memory of having missed mass was indelibly imprinted on those for whom it was unthinkable not to be there with the community to attend the Eucharistic celebration.

For some time, many of us have been waiting for the bishops to reinstate the requirement that baptized Catholics are obligated to attend Sunday mass. In our diocese, Bishop William McGrattan has now decreed that this obligation will begin again on Pentecost, two Sundays from now. That's the basics of the announcement, but today's passages from Sacred Scripture powerfully remind us of what is most important about this announcement.

Acts of the Apostles

The authority of our bishop to make such a command is from Jesus Christ, which he gave to the apostles, and which they gave to their successors, even down to our day, two thousand years later. This is the remarkable thing. If we are to believe in Jesus, which means to believe Jesus, his divine and kingly authority has not disappeared one little bit. It was present, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in Peter and James and John and the others, and so it is still equally present in Bishop William and the others. We must pray that they use that authority always under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is with us today in this way. This should make us shout with joy even more than the psalmists do, who did not know the Saviour, yet were inspired to proclaim God's saving power that would ultimately be made known fully in Jesus Christ.

Psalm

"My heart is steadfast, O God. I will sing and make music. I will give thanks to you among the peoples. I will sing praises to you among the nations. For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth." Doesn't this sound like the joy of those who respond to the obligation to attend mass, hear his word, worship his divine presence, receive his Body and Blood, then go out and sing praises to the nations?

Gospel of John

The early Church had its false teachers who were causing division and anxiety. But the Church rejoiced that there was a commandment given by the apostles, which was inspired by the Holy Spirit and agreed to by everyone.

They recognized that it was the authority of Jesus himself, who had given the commandment to love one another. Who would argue against a commandment, an obligation, to love, especially when the greatest love is to lay down one's life for one's friends? The one who is beyond comprehension wants to be our friend. You are my friend, Jesus says, if you obey my commandments.

Paul and Barnabas were certified and approved by the Church because, it says today, they risked their lives for the gospel, for the Good News of God's love for all people. They were following Jesus' command to love. That was what gave them authority.

What Shall We Do

The bishops, in their letter to us in Alberta, tell us that the word "obligation" may be taken negatively even when our sacred duty to worship God is one of our greatest privileges in choosing freely to respond to His initiative to reach out to us and shower us with His great love. Worship is our free response! May the days leading to Pentecost continue to open us up to the graces of Easter and to a joyful response to our obligation to worship, to let Jesus fill us with love, and so enter into that intimate embrace of friendship with God.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and divinity and wisdom and strength and honour, alleluia.*

Collect: *Grant us, Lord, that what we celebrate in joy may protect and save us.*

Acts: *The apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, with the following letter: To the believers of Gentile origin, certain persons with no instructions from us have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds. It is seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: That you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.*

Psalm: *My heart is steadfast, O God. I will sing and make music. I will give thanks to you among the peoples. I will sing praises to you among the nations. For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth.*

John: *During the supper, Jesus said to the disciples, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you to bear fruit that will last. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*