

Homily for Fifth Sunday of Easter

*The Divine Comedy*

Acts 14:21–27  
Revelation 21:1–5a  
John 13:31–33a, 34–35

I have mentioned in previous homilies, C.S. Lewis' children's series *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In the seventh and last book, entitled "The Last Battle" the central characters Peter, Lucy and Edmund are killed in England in a train accident. Lewis with concise and vivid prose puts their deaths in the greater perspective of heaven and eternity when he comments:

**"All their life in this world and all their adventures had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."**

Ever since I first read this quote it has captured my imagination. It reminds us that our lives and all we experience in this world is only the beginning of the Great Story that will really unfold in the world beyond this world.

So today I want to ask the question:

***What kind of story is The Great Story? Is it a tragedy or is it a comedy?***

A tragedy ends with all of the main characters dying. A comedy ends with a wedding and a marriage. The story that is played out in our respective lives finds its deeper meaning when joined with the Great Story. It is this story, whose Title Page we call the Holy Bible. When we think about this story as it is portrayed through the seventy three books of the Bible, we recognize that we are participating in the Divine Comedy. Not only does the Bible begin with a wedding, in its penultimate chapter, Revelation 21 , we hear these words:

***And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.***

We read in Genesis 2, the forming of Adam from the dust of the ground. And then from his side, his bride Eve is brought to life. Think then of the Church, most aptly described St. John as the Bride of Christ. Just as Adam's bride was fashioned from his side, so too with Jesus' bride. For there on the Cross, from his side, out poured water and blood. The Water of Baptism and the Blood of the Eucharist.

Now in Revelation we hear declared the Climax of this Divine Comedy. Now the Bride is ready to be received by her lover and husband Jesus.

This marriage will be consummated at the time of the Second Coming. When all of those in heaven will be joined with those still on earth. St John says that this Divine Comedy will be filled with such laughter and gaiety. Listen.

***Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.***

The New Heaven will be joined to the New Earth in a way not possible now. In the present age, the first heaven and first earth are separated. This is because the world in its current configuration is under the domain of the Devil. We know this because back in Revelation 12 we read about the great battle in heaven. At the climax of the battle we are told:

***The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.***

As we continue to read through Revelation, from this point on, we discover that it is out of the Sea that evil creatures come forth to wreck-havoc on the earth. When reading these chapters of Revelation, 13 – 18, we think, “oh no this is not going to end well”. We are in a tragedy that will see everyone dead at the end. But then we find ourselves in chapter 21. Even back in chapter 19 we hear the Wedding Bells for there we are told about the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. By the time we arrive at chapter 21 the bells are in full peal. There is a New Heaven, a New Earth, a Bride and a Bride Groom and there is no more Sea. In other words the realm of evil will no longer exist, so that heaven and earth will then be joined together. Such a world will be one where there is true harmony and perfect unity. It will be characterized as the Marriage that will be truly blissful. Checkout the language. It is so hopeful, exuberant and confident.

***See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them as their God;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them;  
⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away.”***

It was because C. S. Lewis knew this story so well and understood that the Christian narrative is the most amazing Comedy imaginable that he could say:

***Now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”***

Beloved, because of our baptism, because of our participation in the Eucharist, because of placing our faith and hope in Jesus Christ we are in a comedy and not a tragedy. Even though at times it can seem that the present experience of life has more of the character of a tragedy, this really is not so. Thankfully God in his grace and mercy has given us such a clear indication of how the Story in this world will come to its conclusion so that the story where every chapter will be better than the one before can begin.

However, because we live in this in between time, where the Wedding of Revelation 21 is still in our future, we are to live in the present as those who know they are the beloved bride of Jesus Christ. What this means is that our lives are to be marked by that love which in the end will be all in all. In the present we are to live knowing that we are part of the Love Story that is the Divine Comedy and not the Demonic Tragedy. And so we are to hear Jesus say:

***“A New Commandment I give to you that you are to love one another as I have loved you”***

Where is such a commandment to be lived out? In this world. In your families, work placed, recreational venues and church. But this is a world where there will be those who don't want to join in the Comedy but choose to make their lives a tragedy. We read in the verses immediately preceding these ones, where Jesus gives the New Commandment that Judas Iscariot went out and it was night. Within a few hours he would return with the Temple guards and then disingenuously kiss Jesus with a greeting that would become the kiss of death for both Jesus and Judas. Here at that time when it seemed most likely we are finding ourselves in a tragedy Jesus says, no this is a comedy. This is a love story, not a hate story.

Love is the identity card of the true disciple (John 13:35). The new covenant of love is the thrust of the New Testament. The measure of love required by this new commandment is the measure by which Jesus loves us, not how we love ourselves. Christians must serve and forgive one another even as Jesus served, forgave, and purified His disciples, knowing that they would betray and abandon Him. We cannot comprehend the challenge of this commandment until we grasp the depths of Jesus' love for us. We need to see him as the bridegroom who is always faithful.

The commandment to love one another, encompasses all of the other commandments and prescriptions of the law and fully manifests the Father's will. In loving another, one seeks out the best for the beloved. Love has the power to build up, to transform, and to enoble.

It is only when we understand that the Great Story is a Comedy that we can live out our parts of this story inspired by the New Commandment to love.

St John of the Cross reminds us:

*“At the evening of life, you will be judged on your love”*

On judgment day, will it be more important how smart you were, how many promotions you received, how much overtime you worked, how many committees you served on or how well you loved those God put in your life?

We are part of the Love Story the Divine Comedy:

*“which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”*

Let us pray:

*Lord God, our strength and salvation, put in us the flame of Your love  
and make our love for You grow to a perfect love  
which reaches to our neighbor.<sup>1</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> Ponessa, J., & Manhardt, L. W. (2004). *The Gospel of John* (p. 117). Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing.