

Homily - 5th Sunday of Easter C

"I... saw a new heaven and a new earth.... The One who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'" These words from our Second Reading (Rev 21:1-5) proclaim a new creation. The people of God have been made "the holy city, a new Jerusalem ... prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.... God's dwelling is [now] with the human race." God will deliver us from all evils that afflict us and give us peace and lasting fulfillment.

How did God bring about this new order? It is through the Easter mysteries that we are celebrating at this time. The Easter event, the Paschal Mystery of Christ's death and resurrection has established a "radically new context". The whole of creation is transformed and renewed forever. Things will never be the same again. Indeed, as the Church proclaims in the Preface of Easter (option four), "Father... we praise you with greater joy than ever in this Easter season, when Christ became our paschal sacrifice. In him a new age has dawned, the long reign of sin is ended, a broken world has been renewed, and we are once again made whole."

This newness implies, first, that our relationship with God is transformed forever. We often talk about being human and rationalize our sins. Here we are reminded that we no longer relate with God according to our fallen human nature; we relate with God primarily from our nature "resurrected". We relate with God with the dignity of redeemed sons and daughters. Jesus has salvaged our fragile human nature. Human flesh is no longer an object of ridicule; it has been conferred with risen and redeemed dignity. Accordingly, we must live our lives with the consciousness of the glorified nature won for us through the Blood of the Lamb. We are a new creation, with a new beginning and a new opportunity.

Second, our relationship with our fellow humans is transformed forever. Hitherto, we were enjoined simply to "Love your neighbor as yourself." Obviously, some people do harm to themselves and to others. How many times have we read or heard about people who take their family's life and theirs? You wonder what could push somebody that far? Now Jesus perfects the commandment to love neighbor, saying, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." How did Jesus love us? We were enemies of God through sin and were sentenced to death, but Jesus offered to die in our place to save us. This is a radical departure from the Old Testa-

ment rule of "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy" (Matt 5:43). Jesus lovingly dies for the sinner, for the enemy. He shows us we must make sacrifices even for our enemies, we must love them even to the point of dying for their salvation. Is this the person I think I am in Christ? Is this the person others think I am? Let us pray for "a new heart" and "a new spirit". "Behold, I make all things new."

Third, our attitude in the face of the crosses of life has been transformed. See how Jesus responded to his imminent cross and death in our Gospel passage (Jn 13:31-33a, 34-35). After Judas Iscariot left the dinner table to plot his betrayal, what did Jesus do? Did he begin to cry, complain and blame God? Not at all! Instead, he proclaimed it in a new way, "Now is the son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him." He saw it as an opportunity for glorification. We should aspire to be like Christ. Challenges of life should be seen as stepping stones to greater heights, not stumbling blocks. Peter originally scared to death and denied Jesus three times, was later fearless and humble in death, saying, "I'm not worthy to be crucified in the same way as my Master." What a change! I recently encountered an exceptional sick and homebound parishioner. She has been sick for many years. Her speech is somewhat affected and scarcely audible. Yet she told me, "Father, every morning when I wake up, I thank God for the gift of another day." While I was still pondering on that statement, she added, "Father, if God gives one a cross, one should carry it." What an outstanding faith! In our First Reading (Acts 14:21-27), Paul and Barnabas declared, exhorting the early Christians, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."

Finally, love between the members of the Church has been raised up to a new height and conferred with an evangelizing character: "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." God uses our good Christian witness to love as an instrument to open "the door of faith to the gentiles." We must always live in the consciousness that we are one people of God. We should see fellow Catholics and Christians as primarily our brother or sister in Christ, irrespective of whether the person is Hispanic, Black, White or Asian. Christians are accountable to God over scandals resulting from our petty discriminations. We have a mission in the world to make all Christians, to make all one in Christ. Let not political and nationalistic sentiments obscure or hinder our fundamental God given mission to bring all to Christ in love. Amen!