

Homily: FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER MAY19 2019

Acts 14:21-27

Revelation 21:1-5

John 13:31-33, 34-35

The Lord's words in today's Gospel reading are very familiar. We have heard them hundreds of times. "Love one another. That is how people will know you are my disciples." We can reflect on these well-known words of Christ from the Last Supper.

What's in a name?- Names and titles can trigger certain reactions in me- Some names become stereotypes. When I hear that someone is Irish or French, from Texas or Vermont, is a Republican or a Democrat, is a doctor, an accountant or an actor, certain feelings and expectations are evoked about what that individual will be like.

What do people today think when they hear the word "Christian"? What should "Christian" mean to people? When someone says to me "Here is Fred, Linda, Tom or Betty and, by the way, he or she is a Christian," what do people expect from me who am supposed to be a Christian. Today the reaction may be different from years ago.

In some circles the name "Christian" evokes impressions of intolerance, politicized and power-hungry religion, oppressive proselytizing, an absence of respect for non-Christians and perhaps an anti-Intellectualism. In other circles, the name "Christian" will indicate someone on whom I can rely to tell the truth, who treats all people with respect, whose word I can trust, who is concerned with fairness in our world, who lives not by majority opinion but by God's law, who knows that he or she has a purpose wider than this world. To everyone, the name "Christian" should mean someone who is trying to follow the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. All of these later characteristics should define me as his disciple.

The life of Jesus, the magnificent moment when He walked the earth 2000 years ago, died and rose from the dead,- wasn't supposed to be just an inspiring

memory. It was a way of life that was to continue in His followers so that His love would continue to touch and heal the world.

In today's first reading, we read about the apostles visiting the first Christian seed communities, the "cells" of Christ's love that were being planted in the world of that time. None of these communities in the early Church were perfect. The Book of Revelation tells me in today's second reading that the perfect Jerusalem will come down from heaven only at the end of history. It will not grow from the earth because our human imperfection remains with us. Still, the early Christian communities and parishes today are meant to be seedbeds of Christ's truth and love by me.

At my best, I am the place of - a rebirth of living according to Gospel truth. I am the place for the rebirth of respect for all human life. I am the seedbed for a rebirth of respect for sexuality, - marriage- human dignity, honesty. I am the seedbed for the birth of a new King of relationship among people based not on power but on respect.

There is always the temptation to turn Christian living into a kind of optional amenity which is nice to have but is not really needed. Such a view would see possession of the truth as all that is needed to be saved. The truth is necessary but not sufficient. Salvation comes not when we possess the truth but are possessed by it.

Some say the Jesus' emphasis here on love within the Christian community is more introspective than His great teaching about reaching out to the poor, the hungry, the thirsty and the imprisoned. The powerful point the Lord is making in these Last Supper words is that the Church must exhibit the message it is sent to give to the world. The Christian community in which I now live can be a great test of my faith. It is much easiest to be charitable to people far away or in other denominations with whom I do not have to deal on a daily basis. But the Lord is teaching me that charity begins at home. People will be able to spot me as a disciple of Jesus by the love I have for each and every person I am in relationship with. If I try to love each other as Christ loves me, I am trying to love as Christ did is the Easter fire I bring to my family, my friends my parish and my fellow-

workers. My Christianity is not just for my web sites but for my work sites. For people today, the strongest proof that Christ is truly Risen is not found in any book but in how I claim to be His follower. It requires the very presence of Christ within me. If anything brings people to Jesus it will be me practicing authentic Christian. The shadow side to this truth is that if anything keeps people from Jesus, it will be as Christians as well.

The modern world is still thrilled and awed to discover a place where the fire of Christ's love still burns bright. Does the Easter fire still burn within my heart? Am I willing to be carrier of the fire?

CONCLUSION

IF CHRIST WALKED THROUGH THE MAIN DOORS OF THIS CHURCH this morning, and walked up the center Aisle during this MASS- NOW: Do you think He would recognize in me his Christian Church this morning?

AMEN.