

5th Sunday of Easter - C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Acts 14:21-27

Last week we heard of Saint Paul's experiences at Antioch in Pisidia during his first missionary journey. That visit had ended on a sour note as Paul and Barnabas were expelled. The reading ended with "the two shook the dust from their feet in protest and went on to Iconium. Their disciples knew only how to be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:51-52). Today we hear of the conclusion of this first missionary journey where Paul and Barnabas retrace their steps back through Antioch in Pisidia on their way back to Antioch in Syria where they had begun their journey.

²¹ After they [Paul and Barnabas] had proclaimed the good news to that city and made a considerable number of disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch.

These are towns from which they had been driven. Like Jesus who was driven from Nazareth (Luke 4:29-30), they return to preach again.

²² They strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith,

Although beleaguered, the apostles exhort the faithful to the unflinching practice of Christianity. Recall that persecution is a reward of discipleship.

saying, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."²³ They appointed presbyters for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith.

Paul and Barnabas see that a structure and an institution are set up locally. The structure possibly resembles the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 5, 22; 21:18). It is significant to note that the elders are not elected by the congregation, but appointed by the traveling apostles (the bishops). These newly appointed elders have a share in the hierarchical and priestly ministry of the apostles, from whom their own ministry derives.

²⁴ Then they traveled through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia. ²⁵ After proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia. ²⁶ From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now accomplished.

Saints Paul and Barnabas return to Syrian Antioch by journeying through the cities they have visited – in reverse order. Their journey, which began around the year 45, lasted for four years.

27 And when they arrived, they called the church together and reported what God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

This figure of speech, “door of faith,” is also used by Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:9 and 2 Corinthians 2:12. Here it signifies the access to salvation that God had given the Gentiles through the missionaries.

2nd Reading - Revelation 21:1-5a

For the past three weeks we have had as our second reading an account of John’s privileged vision of the heavenly liturgy where he has seen the eternal sacrifice being offered to God the Father by His Son, The New and Eternal High priest and sacrifice. We have heard also the prayers being offered by the faithful. We now go to the end of John’s account as he describes the Heavenly Jerusalem. It was Jesus’ mission to go to the earthly Jerusalem to offer His sacrifice – this shows us the path that we must follow to reach the Heavenly Jerusalem so that we can dwell with Him there forever.

21:1 Then I [John] saw

Saint John begins this, the last and lengthiest in the final series of visions, with the words “And I saw.” Although this is the seventh vision in the series, it is the eighth occurrence of the phrase “and I saw” – the number eight being associated in Hebrew numerology with the resurrection and regeneration (Hebrew males were circumcised on the eighth day, Jesus was resurrected on the eighth day).

a new heaven and a new earth.

The term used here for “new,” *kainos*, means newness in kind – of superior quality. The term *neos* would have been used to denote newness in chronology. Creation must be renewed in order to benefit redeemed humanity (see [Isaiah 65:17-25](#)). Adam’s work of heavenizing the earth has been completed by Jesus.

The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

The “sea” is the laver outside the Holy Place in the Temple, where the Levitical priests performed ritual ablutions prior to offering sacrifice. Saint Peter describes this as the destruction of “the present heavens and earth” (2 Peter 3:7), making way for “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Peter 3:13). Because of the “end of the world” terminology used in this passage, many have mistakenly assumed that Saint John is speaking of the final end of the physical heavens and earth, rather than the dissolution of the Old Covenant world order, the “world” as the Jews knew it. The Temple of the New Covenant, over which Jesus presides as High Priest, is infinitely superior to the Temple of the Old Covenant, presided over by Moses (see 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:1-6).

² I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

It comes down from heaven therefore it is of divine origin (James 1:17). God is the architect and builder of the city (Hebrews 11:10). It is holy because it is definitively consecrated to God.

prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

A symbol of the union of the faithful with their Lord. Saint John's clear identification of the City as the Bride of Christ serves as another demonstration that the City of God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, is a present as well as future reality. The "Bride" of the weekly Eucharistic wedding feast (Revelation 19:7-9) is the "beloved city" of the Kingdom of Christ (see Revelation 20:9). We are in the New Jerusalem now, as the Bible categorically tells us; ". . . *you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven . . .*" (Hebrews 12:22-23).

³ I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

The voice renews the old promises (see Leviticus 26:11-12; Ezekiel 37:27).

"Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them (as their God).

The plan from the beginning was that God would be the father, and His creation would be the child of the covenant (Genesis 17:8; Exodus 29:45). The theme we see echoed throughout the Old and New Testaments is "I will be their God and they will be my people."

⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes,

Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 7:17.

and there shall be no more death or mourning,

Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 20:13.

wailing or pain, (for) the old order has passed away."

The old covenant disappears, with all those repulsive characteristics that gave it the appearance of a creation enslaved to sin.

^{5a} The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

This is the only passage in the book of Revelation in which God Himself speaks. He declares that everything described in our reading today will be accomplished. This is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 43:18-21. *So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have*

passed away; behold, new things have come (2 Corinthians 5:17). The messianic times, the end times, have begun.

Gospel - John 13:31-33a, 34-35

We are all familiar with the ten commandments. We use them as part of our examination of conscience prior to receiving the sacrament of reconciliation/penance/confession. All of Jesus' instruction was based on the Hebrew scripture; with one notable exception – He gave us one new commandment. Even this commandment is rooted in Hebrew scripture although the root was not counted in the 613 Levitical commandments (Mark 12:29). The time of this reading is at the last supper just after Jesus has predicted His betrayal and prior to their leaving for Gethsemane, which means “oil press” – suitable since it is located on the Mount of Olives.

³¹ When he had left, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

The glorification of the Son is that of the Father; the one is effected in the other. This glorification will happen immediately. Judas' departure has started the event.

³² (If God is glorified in him,) God will also glorify him in himself, and he will glorify him at once.

The glorification of the Son is contingent on the fact that the Son has already glorified God by fulfilling His mission (see [John 17:1-5](#)).

^{33a} My children,

Actually, “little children” the only occurrence of this word in this gospel. Sets the tone of the departing patriarch addressing his decedents.

I will be with you only a little while longer. ³⁴ I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.

This commandment is new because it is grounded not so much in the love commands of the Jewish tradition (Leviticus 19:18), but in the self-offering love (*agape*) of Jesus.

³⁵ This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The living out of this commandment is to become the distinctive mark of the Christian community among outsiders (see also Luke 17:23b).