

The Fifth Sunday of Easter, Cycle C 2022

During the missionary efforts of St. Paul, there is a consistent pattern of the sequence of events. Firstly he visits the local synagogue and preaches there until the leaders of the synagogues throw him out for preaching about Jesus. He then turns to the gentiles who readily accept the gospel. Throughout his missionary travels, he endures persecution. However, he never allows this to discourage him from preaching for which he believes that is his divinely appointed duty. He continues to teach, advise, console, to uplift his newly formed churches. You too have been appointed during your baptism to preach the Gospel. Like Paul, never be discouraged from preaching the Gospel.

In today's reading, St Paul reminds us that "It is necessary to undergo hardship to enter the kingdom of God". Every athlete knows that if he or she wishes to develop more muscles or endurance, he or she needs to be challenged by heavier weights or longer times or greater distances. Unless our faith is tested, our faith will never grow, worse yet, we will believe that we, by ourselves, are strong enough to resist the following: the temptation of the flesh, the rejection by friends for your beliefs, or persecution for your religious convictions. Our failure when our faith is tested can make us realize that we are totally dependent on the help of God and the grace from God in these situations. The trials of life can draw us closer to God or separate us from him. We can choose the path of Peter who wept bitterly but later experienced God's mercy and forgiveness and became the leader of the Christian faith, or that of Judas who could not accept his failure and sinfulness, and without understanding the mercy of God, ended his own life.

For us to grow in faith we have to enter the storm, to cross the barren desert, or to face the powers of hell. Only when, by the grace of God, we have overcome impossible odds, and we have survived the hardships that threatened to crush us, we shall know that God is with us in the good times and the bad times. We shall know that he is always at our side.

In the Gospel, Jesus' commandment to love one another is given to the apostles as a crisis is about to unfold. Judas is about to be betray Jesus and to have him arrested. This will result in his passion and crucifixion.

Jesus had expanded the Jewish understanding of love of neighbor which was limited to fellow Jews to include strangers, foreigners and enemies with his parable of the good Samaritan

The hurt and anger at the unjust condemnation of Jesus, followed by his passion and death, could have resulted in arguments among the disciples, blaming each other for abandoning or denying Jesus.

In a crisis we need to love each other, that is to demonstrate patience, compassion, forgiveness and mercy, least we turn against each other and destroy the unity of the family or group.

Without forgiveness and mercy, disputes with enemies and hatred of others will continue for years. Love one another as Jesus has loved us. No sacrifice was too great for him, even his own life.