

## ***Easter V***

### ***May 2, 2010***

We're still in the Great Fifty Days of Easter, and the lessons are still about telling us what it means to be baptized. As a part of this, the Gospel this Sunday, and for the next two Sundays, takes us back to John's telling of Holy Week—but this time as a way to help the newly baptized discover more of the meaning of the life they have chosen. The scene is the last supper—the night he was betrayed. Judas Iscariot has just left the room to make his own deals, to go his own way. The meal was almost over, Jesus is poised on the edge of darkness, and he speaks to his disciples, and to us, about three things. | | He speaks of glory, he speaks of love, and he speaks of what it looks like to be known as his disciple. This is basic stuff, this is what we believe, this is what it means to be a Christian person.

First, before anything else, Jesus speaks of glory; of the glorification of the son of man, and of the Father. Listen especially to one word. That word is “now”. “Now”, Jesus says, “Now”—as Judas gathers the soldiers and counts his money; “Now”—as Caiaphas and the rest prepare for the trial; “Now”—as the final plans for the execution are made. “*Now*” Jesus says, now is the son of man glorified. Not next Sunday, not Easter Day, but now.

Jesus' glory is not in the victory and triumph the disciples had hoped for and expected; but in the suffering and death of Golgotha. His glory is not in the bloody revolt the Romans feared; but in the very method Rome used to protect itself. *Now*, Jesus said as he waited for the end to begin—Now is the Son of Man glorified.

Glory, you see, is the revealing—the showing forth—of the power and love of God. And at the heart of our faith is the wonderful and terrible realization that nowhere, ever, has that power and that love been show more clearly than on the cross. If we are ever to approach the depths of our faith, we need to struggle with that fact. *This*, the cross, this is the glorification of God. The world out there has never been able to comprehend it; and never will.

The world out there sees power and glory in the ability to control and manipulate, to be in charge, to be the greatest, to coerce, to rule, to kill. The world sees no glory in the faithful obedience that results in the cross. There's no way around it, to the world out there the cross will always be foolishness, or a stumbling block to faith, or both. And it is precisely to the extent that the world owns us that we will also see the cross as folly—or as a high admission cost to the resurrection. Yet it is exactly at this moment of darkest tragedy that the Glory of God is truly revealed—that the time of salvation is at hand. | | This is hard stuff. It's hard to grasp; it's hard to take seriously; it's hard to believe.

Even when we can see a little of the glory of the Cross; even when we can be captured and drawn by a love so bold and so reckless that it does not slow down even in the face of death—even then—we're not quite sure what to do with it. How do we respond to such glory; how do we make it our own; how do we show it a world dying for the lack of it?

This is what Jesus talks about next. He talks about how we are to respond to the glorification of the Son of Man. He talks about how we can make Easter keep going. The Lord says that if his glorification, if his sacrifice, if these are to make any sense; if they are to be understood, and cared about; shared and proclaimed, if that is to happen, Jesus says, it will happen if we, and as we, love one another.

We share his glory as we share his life: we share his life as we obey his new commandment. That's the way it works. That's the way we say 'yes' to him, to his sacrifice, and to the new life his sacrifice offers. By obedience; by love.

On the night he was betrayed the Lord said: “Now the Son of Man is glorified”, and, in order to tie that to our lives, he said, “A new commandment I give to you; that you love one another, even as I have loved you.”

Now, as much as we talk about love, as much as we hear about love, and as much as we and everybody we know are firmly in favor of love—as central as love is to our vocabulary, our culture, and our lives—we still constantly forget that when Jesus talks about love, he doesn’t mean what we usually mean when *we* talk about love.

It’s always a struggle to get it through our heads that Jesus does not call us to love one another the way Romeo loved Juliet, or the way Timmy loved Lassie or the way we love chocolate, or even the way we love our friends or our mothers. We are commanded to love one another only and precisely in one way—in the way Jesus loved us.

Listen again to the new commandment: “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another”. This means that there is only one way we can come to know what Jesus is talking about when he talks about love; and that way is by learning it from him: there just isn’t any other way to get there. That’s why so much of the Christian life—the life of prayer, sacraments, worship, study, fellowship and service—why so much of this has to do with discovering Jesus and learning what it looks like for him to love us—we need to know this if we are to love one another.

Knowing that we have to look to Jesus in order to discover the meaning of Christian love is vital. It can protect us from some of the more grotesque mistakes made in the name of love; and it can keep us from confusing what our Lord commands us with what just about every TV commercial in the world promises us we’ll get if we buy what they’re selling.

But there's more. Jesus then talks about why we are to love one another, about one of the things this love is all about. Listen: "By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." The call to love one another is given for the sake of our mission, our witness to the world. The Lord wills that this special love for one another be a visible sign to the world of his continuing presence in us.

Here Jesus is not talking only, or even primarily, about the individual Christian. He's talking about the Christian community. He's not just saying that you, or you, or you individually might be the only Bible some people read. He is also, and more powerfully, saying that we—that St. Nicholas—may be the only Bible many people read—and individually we are part of that witness. And the quality of our life together—the fact we have love for one another—this is central to this witness.

We are not given the command to love so that we can be happy, so that we can feel warm and cozy, comfortable and secure. We are given the command to love for the sake of our mission—so that the Lord may be known by us and through us; and so that through us, others can be drawn to him.

All of these things Jesus spoke of on the night he was betrayed: his glorification, his commandment to love, and his will that our love reveal his presence. All of these show us what it looks like to be baptized. They are a call to base our lives, our lives as individuals and, just as importantly, our life as a parish, on him, on his life, and on this new commandment he gives us.