

# John 13:31-33a,34-35; 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

May 18, 2025, Year C

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Today the Church celebrates the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter. We have spent the first three Sundays of this Easter Season focused on the Resurrection accounts that celebrate Jesus' victory over sin and death, and the freedom He won for us through His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Last week we celebrated Good Shepherd Sunday where we read from Chapter 10 of John's Gospel focusing on hearing the Good Shepherd's voice and how He knows us, and how as we follow Him, He leads us to eternal life. Today's Gospel takes us back to Holy Week, to the Last Supper where Jesus gives us a New Commandment to go along with the New Covenant He is instituting. We hear the Good Shepherd's voice as Jesus give us a new way to live, a new way to orient our lives and that is to love one another, even as He loves us.

A new commandment from Jesus is important for us to understand and to fully grasp what He is telling us we need to understand the context from which He is speaking. Jesus has gathered all His apostles to celebrate the Passover the night before He is taken into custody, tried by the Chief Priests and Pharisees as well as by Herod and Pontius Pilate. He will be executed by crucifixion; the most brutal way the Roman Empire could think of. These are all the events we have just lived through as a parish, with Jesus, in our recent Holy Week liturgies.

Our reading for today is from John's Gospel which has a different focus on the Last Supper when compared to the other three Gospels. John's Gospel does not have the institution of the Eucharist as the other three synoptic Gospels do, but it does have the institution of Holy Orders, the institution of the priesthood, where Jesus takes the place of a slave and washes the feet of His disciples to show them what leadership will, or what it should, look like in His Church. Our reading is situated in between two highly notable events. Immediately before Jesus

gives His New Commandment, He predicts one of His disciples will betray Him and immediately after he gives His New Commandment, He predicts one of his disciples will deny Him. There are many momentous events that happen during this critical night of Jesus' life, and the Church does not want us to miss any of it.

Our reading today begins with, "When Judas had left the room." I just told you that Jesus predicted his betrayal, but he did more than that; He identified His betrayer, and He sent him out on his fateful mission by telling him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Once Judas leaves the Upper Room, Jesus says, *"Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself and God will glorify Him at once."* There is a lot of glorifying and being glorified going on here. My question was why does Jesus choose this moment to speak of being glorified? What is the connection between His glorification and Judas going out into the night? Fr. John Bartunek says the connection is love. He says, *"Love means self-giving: by accepting the suffering and death that Judas' betrayal brings on, Jesus is revealing, making visible, God's immeasurable love for each one of us. He loves us so much that He is willing to suffer in our place, even while we were still sinners."*<sup>1</sup> In other words, Judas' betrayal sets in motion the events that will lead to our salvation. The Father is glorified in His love for us as He offers that which is most precious to Him, His only begotten Son, as a sacrifice to save you and me. Jesus is glorified by His willingness to be obedient to His Father's plan for our salvation, out love for His Father and out of love for us.

This is the context in which Jesus makes the truly remarkable statement, "A new commandment I give to you ..." Who was it that gave us the "old" commandments? It was God. God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses to give to the people. God is the only one

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<sup>1</sup> Bartunek, John, The Better Part

who gives morally binding commandments on His people. Jesus is speaking and acting in the person of God. This is one of those statements by Jesus that challenges anyone who says, “Jesus was a good man who said many profound things, or he was a great moral teacher, but I can’t accept His claim that he is God.” Jesus is clearly speaking and acting here in the person of God.

The New Commandment that Jesus gives us is: “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” Jesus is telling His disciples and all of us that we are to love one another as He loves us. This means we must serve one another as He served; It means we must be willing to go as far as taking the place of a slave and washing the feet of our brothers and sisters just as He did. It means we must forgive the way Jesus forgave; it means we must not seek revenge against those who hate us but forgive even those who are crucifying us, just as He did. The New Commandment means loving as Jesus loved; it means we must seek the good of the other before our own self-interest and be willing to lay down our lives for the salvation of others, just as He did. This is the Law of the Kingdom of God, the Law of self-giving, sacrificial love.

If you are like me, this sounds pretty intimidating and seems nearly impossible for weak and sinful human beings, but we know that it is possible because we have the Church’s witness of the Communion of Saints; the men and women who lived out Jesus’ New Commandment throughout the 2000-year history of the Church. Men like Saint Maximillian Kolbe, who sacrificed his life by voluntarily taking the place of another man condemned to die in Auschwitz, and women like Saint Mother Theresa who poured out her life serving some of the poorest people in the world in the slums of Calcutta.

We can see that the great saints of the Church were able to live out the New Commandment, but isn’t this commandment supposed to be for all of us; isn’t this way of life

what the Second Vatican Council called the “Universal Call to Holiness”, that all of us are called to love as Jesus loved? The New Commandment is indeed for all of us because Jesus calls all of us to become great saints, and as impossible as that may sound, there are many “ordinary” people striving to live out the New Commandment, here among us, who may not be quite perfect yet, but who are showing us the way. There are single parents, putting their lives on hold, doing their best to provide for and care for their children, to give them the love and help they need to grow and thrive. There are those who are struggling with taking care of their elderly parents, trying to make sure they have the care they need at the end of their lives and still balance the demands and difficulties of their own busy lives. We have seen powerful examples of married couples where one of the spouses become severely ill, and their spouse puts their life on hold to provide the care they needed and accompanied and comforted them on their journey home. There are parents with children who have disabilities that require constant care who are pouring themselves out in love for their kids trying to make sure they are getting the help and care they need to live full and meaningful lives. There are many parents struggling to strike the right balance between the work they need to do to provide for their families with the attention and care their children need. There are many among us are dealing with children, siblings, parents, or friends who have fallen away from the Faith, who find themselves constantly praying for the Lord to open their loved one’s hearts and for them to come home to the Church to find the love and mercy the Father has waiting for them.

This same love for the lost, for those who do not know the love of Jesus, is what launched the Church out into the world that we read about in our First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles. We see the almost frenetic energy that drove the Apostles to undergo many trials and tribulations to proclaim Jesus Christ risen from the dead and that salvation was now open to all

in Jesus, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, woman and man. Common to all these examples is that there is a cost to holiness, to being a saint, as Saint Paul tells us, “It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>2</sup> I think it is safe to say, wherever we find a cross, we find an invitation to become a saint.

We can ask why does it have to be this way, why does Jesus give us such a demanding and costly commandment? I believe Jesus gives us this New Commandment because He wants us to live like He did. He knows that we are going to experience trials and suffering in this life and loving the way He did is the best way for us to live. Jesus wants us to go outside of ourselves and share the love He has given us with those in our lives who need it. He gives us this commandment because He knows that when we live like He did, when we give of ourselves in service and love for others, we find the life of abundance that He promises over and over again in the Gospels. When we live like Him, we find the meaning and fulfillment our hearts are seeking; we are storing up treasure in heaven; we are living life to the full.

There is a lot of confusion in our culture today about what it means to be a human being. Jesus of Nazareth is the exemplar of what it means to be human. Jesus shows us the path of human flourishing, that in giving of ourselves in love we become what we are meant to be, and with this New Commandment He calls us to follow Him on that path. Jesus shows us what it means to be fully alive and truly free. By the witness of our lives, and through His grace, may all we meet truly know we are His disciples.

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<sup>2</sup> [\*Catholic Daily Readings\*](#) (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2009).