

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER ~ 15 May 2022

The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

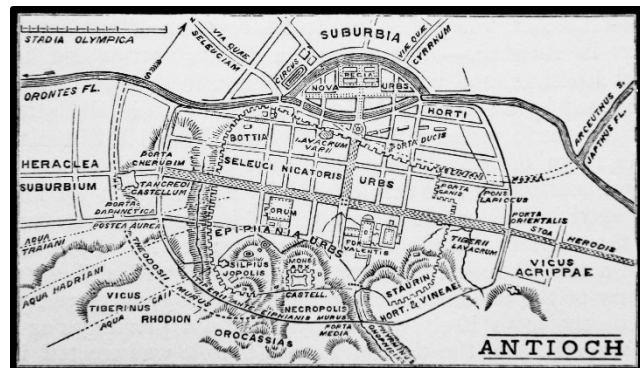
As is not unexpected in these Easter days, the theme which is threaded throughout today's Liturgy of the Word is "newness." Three readings speak about new ways, new journeys, and new realities. They are grounded in Psalm 145 which carries two unchanging truths: "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Ps 145:8-9), and "The Lord's dominion endures throughout all generations" (Ps 145:13). We are familiar with the Hebrew words for "mercy" included in three simple verses – gracious (*hanan*), merciful (*rahamim*), steadfast love (*hesed*), and compassion (*rahamim*).



Today's readings are well-known to us and, therefore, are easy to take for granted. But each reading contains a delightful, almost hidden, surprise which adds new meaning. In the Psalm, we read, "All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord" (Ps 145:10). We are reminded once again that the creation of the universe was God's first incarnation, that we all belong to the sacred community of all creation, that each of God's creatures – people, animals, plants, flowers, insects,

rocks, stars – every single one of us gives thanks by being the one our God has created us to be. When are you your best self, the one God created you to be?

The first reading taken from the Acts of the Apostles finds Paul and Barnabas on the next stage of their journey as they return to Antioch of Syria where their journey had begun. Their journey has led them to open the door of faith for the Gentiles. The hidden surprise in this reading is found in their words to the church gathered to welcome them home as they "related all that God had done with them" (Acts 14:27), not what they had done from their own strengths nor what God had done **for** them. What has God done **with you** on your life's journey? What are some of the unexpected places to which God's invitation has taken you? Who are some of the unexpected people you have met on your journey? Even in this past week, what new thought or image or insight have you experienced that has brought you new hope? What has God done **with you**?



The reading from Revelation speaks to the new heaven and the new earth that have come with the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. There is a profound reminder of God's steadfast presence among us, "See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them; they will be God's peoples, and God will be with them" (Rev 21:3). This echoes the Hebrew name for God from rabbinic literature, *Shekinah* – the one who dwells with us – and the Hebrew name for Jesus as *Emmanuel*, God-with-us. Notice how, in one simple verse, the thought is repeated four times – home of God among mortals, God will dwell with them, they will be God's peoples, and God will

be with them. The repetitions emphasize how important and delightful this is – knowing that God chooses not only to create us and sustain us but actually chooses to dwell among us!

**A new heaven
and a new earth**



The surprise in the reading from Revelation comes with the last sentence, “See, I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5). Notice that God does not say, “See, I am making all new things” even though that is what we probably hear. All things – heaven and earth and you and me – God is making all of us new. The Greek word is quite emphatic, “brand new”! Do you trust that God is making us brand new, every single day?

Some of that newness is evident as we watch grass grow or flowers bloom or babies grow. Some of the newness is evident when we see new ministries emerge – most of us remember when we opened St. Patrick’s Mercy Home or the Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice or The Gathering Place. Some of the newness is evident when we realize that we are growing in our contemplative reflections – on the sacred communion of all creation or deep incarnation or integral ecology. Some of the newness comes when we form new communities – our community here at The Mount or the opening of our house in Huarney.

Less evident to us as we grow older are the ways in which God continues to make us new, to renew us personally. We often use the word “diminishment” to speak about our own lives or the life of our congregation. How disrespectful that is to our creating God who breathes life and energy into our lives every day! Think of the ways since Easter Sunday that God has used you to bring hope or light to someone else or to Earth. Think of the ways since Easter Sunday that you have seen your own goodness reflected in the gratitude or thanks that someone expressed to you for something you had done. Think of the ways since Easter Sunday that you have seen someone doing good for another or others. Think of the ways since Easter Sunday that Earth gave you great joy – softly falling rain or a bright sunrise or a lunar eclipse or that first crocus or the sound of the birds. Think of the ways in which God is making all things new despite the pain and suffering and injustice that continues to happen around us.



Today’s reading from the Last Supper, as recounted in John’s Gospel, speaks starkly to the one way in which we should be known – by our love – not by our good deeds or our great leadership

or our hard work or our brilliant thinking, but by our love. Jesus says it simply and directly, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another” (Jn 13:24). This is not a suggestion or a recommendation; this is a commandment.

Our love for each other is how the world will know who we are and whose we are. Our love for each other is how the world will see, taste, touch, hear, and find Jesus. It is through our love that we will embody Jesus, make Jesus relatable, possible, plausible. Teresa of Avila is said to have written these words, “Christ has no body now but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours, yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

But why does Jesus say that this is a “new” commandment? The book of Deuteronomy had told us to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and might (Deut 6:5), and Leviticus had told us to love our neighbour as ourselves (Lev 19:17-18). I think that there is another hidden surprise in this Gospel reading. Just before Jesus gives us this commandment, we are told, “Judas had gone out” (Jn 13:31). In the other three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), after Judas betrays Jesus, the community of apostles are no longer called the Twelve but the Eleven. However, after Jesus’ Resurrection in John’s Gospel, the group are still called the Twelve (Jn 20:24). Is it possible that we are being reminded in John’s Gospel that Judas remains one of the chosen apostles, remains loved, even after he has betrayed Jesus? Is there newness in the commandment to love one another when we are reminded that we love those who love us, but we also love those who hate us, who disappoint us, who betray us?

Jesus tells us how to love as he loves when he gives us the parable in Matthew 25: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Matt 25:35-36). What is the newness you see in Jesus’ commandment to love one another? What is the new way in which you have lived this commandment in this last year? How have you loved in a new way?

Let us end our reflection this morning with God’s hidden surprises in our heart as we hear this lovely reflection by Steve Garnaas-Holmes:

The Beloved danced around the light,
twirled her galaxy skirts
dreamed of love and made room in herself for another
poured her delight into the palm of her hand,
fashioned it with beauty and set it dancing with joy
yes, you, shining in the dark of her eyes
river into the world flowing with all the others
all one dance, one beauty, one delight
Tell me, child,
what will you do with all that love in you?

Tell me, child, what will you do with all that love in you?

