

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 6: 1-7

1 Peter 2: 4-9

John 14: 1-12

Comforting words from Jesus to his disciples in today's gospel, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me." And comforting words spoken to us on this Fifth Sunday of Easter and on Mother's Day.

I grew up thinking that I was mom's favorite. I am the first-born child and a priest (for a Catholic mother, you can't get much better than that), but after she died in 2009, I discovered that my brothers and sisters also thought that they were her favorite. Surprisingly, upon learning this, I wasn't upset nor did I try to argue with them since it revealed that she loved each of us in the way that each of us needed to be loved. She made us feel as if we were the most important person in her life. Perhaps, this is what makes a mother's love so unique. She knows her children and loves her children with understanding and compassion that only a mother can give.

There is a fundamental human need in each of us TO BE LOVED—whether it's by a mother, a father, a spouse, a child or a friend. To be loved is one of the greatest feelings one can have in this life and it is a foundational belief of our faith. We were made in the image and likeness of God and he loved us so much that he gave us his only Son to be our Savior. His love is merciful, unconditional and eternal. His love is the template in which all love is measured. It is his love that gives us strength, courage, motivation and comfort when we are faced with self-doubt, isolation, sinfulness and sorrow.

But there is more to life than BEING LOVED whether it be human or divine because each of us are also called TO LOVE. And not just *eros*, that is romantic love, or *philia*, the love between friends, but *caritas*. Charity, it is the highest form of love there is. It is giving without receiving. It is grace. We did nothing to earn it, we were undeserving of it and we can never pay it back. That's charity!

Learning how TO LOVE is exactly what the disciples are trying to figure out as they go about proclaiming the Good News after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father. As we read in this week's passage from the Acts of the Apostles, they were faced with a real-life situation—the widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. Perhaps they were being neglected because a widow, at that time, was a non-entity. She was overlooked in the daily distribution just as she was overlooked in everything else in society. Perhaps it was ignorance or since there was no obligation to help someone who is "invisible" then why do it? But, according to charity, otherwise known as "Christian love," it was necessary that the widows (and anybody else) NOT be forgotten, overlooked or ignored. So that is why the twelve chose a group of men (which

we now call deacons) to make sure that *caritas* was being lived not only at the daily distribution but in all aspects of public life and for all people.

We find ourselves in our own real-life situation today. A pandemic that is taking the lives of innocent people, oftentimes the most vulnerable members of society; some people have lost their jobs or are on temporary furlough and are struggling to make ends meet; some people are working in jobs that make them vulnerable to contagion; and we are all being forced to give up our former way of life and the way we traditionally practice our faith.

I recently heard a news report about how people were planning to spend their government stimulus checks. One person said that he was going to invest it, another said she was going to pay her rent and another buy groceries for her children and one couple said that they were going to combine their money and buy a gun!

How you are going to “spend” what you have gained (or lost) during these past six weeks? And I’m not talking about a stimulus check. Has this time made you more appreciative of what you have? Your family, your faith? Have you become more aware of the things that you truly value in life? And the things you can live without? Have you recognized how much time you waste and the hours you spent doing mindless activity? Have you grown to appreciate spending more time with your loved ones? Eating meals with them? Taking walks around the neighborhood with them? Have you become more intentional about making time for prayer and maintaining a relationship with Jesus when you are separated from him in the Eucharist?

The disciples were under a lot of pressure. Everything they knew had been turned upside down. They saw the world with new eyes and though they didn’t always know how to respond to real life situations and problems they always remained focused on the Lord. They knew that he had the answers to life’s biggest questions. He didn’t show them the way or teach them the truth or tell them how to live. Instead he told them, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

My brothers and sisters, when we place our faith in the Lord our hearts are never troubled. We may be concerned or worried or sad. We may not know where we are going how long our journey will last or what it will be like along the way but if we follow the Lord, the way, the truth and the life and we learn to love like he loves, as if we were the most important person in the world, then we will see the Father and we will be one with Him forever.

*Very Rev. William L. Novak, V.G.
May 10, 2020*