

5th Sunday of Easter

by Dr. Rosemary Murphy

Liturgically, we are moving toward the end of the paschal season as we prepare for the feasts of Ascension (May 26, 2022) and for Pentecost Sunday (June 5, 2022). During these 50 days between Easter and Pentecost, we look forward to being renewed by the Spirit so that we can carry on the ministry of our risen Lord.

It is noteworthy for reflection on this Sunday Gospel to recall that in Matthew Chapter 16, in Mark 8, and Luke 9, Jesus asks his disciples: “Who do you say I am?” This question and “Who was Jesus of Nazareth?” are the most fundamental questions of our faith. Much of our rich Catholic doctrine grew out of the Church’s inspired response to these questions. And much of our tradition developed from the Gospel of John, particularly Chapters 13-17, the “last discourse” and the narrative of the night that Jesus was betrayed. Something new takes place as the God of Israel becomes a relationship: a Father, a Son, bound by the personal Spirit of Love between them.

The writing of the late John J. Pilch PhD may be helpful in appreciating today’s scripture passage. In his biblical resource, *The Cultural World of Jesus: Sunday by Sunday Cycle C*, Dr. Pilch speaks of the importance of the cultural context of John’s Gospel in order to find a deeper meaning of Jesus’ message. He writes that “John the evangelist portrays the relationship of Jesus and his heavenly Father in terms of an authentic and perfect Mediterranean relationship between father and son.” (p.76) The Mediterranean imagery employed by John is characterized by honor. Jesus, the perfect Son, honors or glorifies his Father by knowing him intimately because Jesus was taught by his Father and does the will of his Father as the Father empowered him to do.

God the Father’s honor and glory comes with Jesus’ love and obedience even to death on the cross. The Father’s greatest claim to honor is in raising up his Son from the dead and endowing him with an honor that no one else could bestow: risen life.

The intimate love between Jesus and his Father is gifted to Jesus’ followers through the Holy Spirit. This love is the “new commandment,” the entry into a relationship with Jesus and his Father. It is something new for the disciples and for us, a relationship of self-giving, of daily laying down one’s life in service to others.

This is how Jesus’ disciples are recognized and new disciples are attracted to the Christian Way. Today’s message is clear: *Loving of one another as Jesus loves us* is our most successful parish evangelization program.