

THE EMMAUS SERIES

5th Sunday of Easter, Year C

Acts 14:21-27

Apocalypse 21:1-5

John 13:31-35

Love one another; just as I have loved you

During these Sundays of Easter, the liturgy has led us to reflect upon how the disciples came to faith in the Risen Lord, and how they came to terms with the future it opened up for them. Clarifying the message of faith they must bring to the Church of all ages, must have involved looking back upon the frightful drama that led to the Saviour's resurrection, and coming to understand how a 'crucified Christ' could be proclaimed as 'both the power and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor 2). In today's gospel reading we hear how the community inspired by the beloved disciple remembered the words of Jesus at the Last Supper as pointing the way towards understanding.

The drama of the passion had begun – Judas had left to carry through his decision to betray his Master – and Jesus makes an astounding declaration: 'Now has the Son of Man been glorified'. Jesus declares himself to be the 'Son of Man' foretold in the Book of Daniel – the one who will establish God's 'everlasting rule' (Daniel 7). We are helped to understand what the declaration of Jesus means, if we consider the basic meaning of 'glory' in the Scriptures. We instinctively associate the word with fame and acclaim; but the original meaning of the term is associated with weight or heaviness. God's 'glory' is the incomparable density of God's being. Jesus is saying that his passion is an expression of the divine mystery itself, in the depths of a lost world – through what he is now undertaking, he is giving expression to the incomparable greatness that is the life he shares with the Father. The Father's response, Jesus continues, will be the Resurrection – the Father will 'glorify' him by taking him, in the humanity he shares with us, into the incomparable greatness of the Father 'himself'. Paul expresses this Paschal Mystery in simpler terms: 'he emptied himself even to accepting death on a cross. And for this God raised him high and gave him a name which is above all names' (Philippians 2). But in what follows our gospel reading leads us deeper into the mystery of God's 'glory'.

'I give you a new commandment', Jesus continues, 'Love one another, just as I have loved you'. In the love that led him to lay down his life for us, Jesus gives expression to the 'glory', the incomparable mystery of all that he shares with the Father. God's 'glory' is shown to the world - not in power and display - but in an act of selfless love that is the expression in our midst of a decision made from all eternity in the depths of the divine freedom. Making our own the ways of God, and making this 'new commandment' our rule of life, we must lead the world to a meeting with the mystery of God and all the blessings this meeting can bring. The vision of the second reading from the Apocalypse tells of what may be hoped for, when the whole of creation is caught up in the 'glory' the Saviour has brought into the world. Meanwhile, the reading from Acts reminds us, the cross is the way to a sharing in God's 'glory': the 'hardships' of life should not surprise us, as we make our way towards 'the kingdom of God'.

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