

## Fifth Sunday of Easter

### Scripture Readings

#### **First Reading: Acts 14:21-27**

After Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed the good news to that city and made a considerable number of disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch. They strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." They appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith. Then they traveled through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia. After proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now accomplished. And when they arrived, they called the church together and reported what God had done with them and how they had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

#### **Second Reading: Revelation 21:1-5**

Then I, John, saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away." The One who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

#### **Gospel: John 13:31-33, 34-35**

When Judas had left them, Jesus said, "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. My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

### **Psalm 145**

**I will praise your name forever, my king and my God.**

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. The Lord is good to all and compassionate toward all his works.

Let all your works give you thanks, O Lord, and let your faithful ones bless you. Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might.

Let them make known your might to the children of Adam, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is a kingdom for all ages, and your dominion endures through all generations.

**I will praise you name forever, my king and my God.**

**Almighty ever-living God, constantly accomplish the Paschal Mystery within us, that those you were pleased to make new in Holy Baptism may, under your protective care, bear much fruit and come to the joys of life eternal. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen.**

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### What Does It All Mean?

#### First Reading: Acts 14:21-27

Having proclaimed the good news through much of the empire, Paul and Barnabas retrace their steps. During their visits, they reassure their disciples and encourage them to persevere in the faith. If we are to enter the reign of God, we must endure many trials, they say. They help each church to organize, installing elders, and praying and fasting. They continue to visit churches in other cities, eventually to return to Antioch. There they call the church together, to talk about their travels and how God has opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Our twenty-first century ears want to hear these words as factual reports, but it is doubtful that Luke intends them for any such purpose. Instead, the author describes major, long-term developments in church history through narrative focused on the heroic figures of Paul and Barnabas. As Israel's law is anchored in the great hero Moses, Luke interprets first-century persecutions and the mission to the Gentiles through these two apostles, who founded churches all around the great sea. This another transitional passage that illustrates Luke's genius. It propels the epic story of the church's first century into the next chapter's description of the "council of Jerusalem." Today's text serves to amplify the council's dispute between those apostles who insist upon Christian adherence to Jewish law and those, like Paul and Barnabas, who are more open to Gentile conversion.

#### Second Reading: Revelation 21:1-5

John describes a vision of the very last things. The images evoke prophetic literature and some of its promises. He sees new heavens and a new earth. The former heavens and earth have been destroyed. To an audience that remembers the recent destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, John announces the vision of a new Jerusalem, beautiful as a bride meeting her husband. He hears a voice from the throne: "This is God's dwelling among people. God will dwell with them and they will be God's people." God will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more suffering. Then God says: "See, I make all things new!" The visions are grounded in ancient and recent hopes, but John puts a new spin on them. The entire book's tone is apocalyptic. That is, where the prophets spoke in hopes of a restored and vastly improved kingdom of Israel, apocalyptic literature assumes that the whole world has to be destroyed, so that God can build something new. The apocalyptic writer does not share the prophet's strong identification with a specific political group known as a nation or a people. In these senses, apocalyptic is more pessimistic than the prophetic literature. On the other hand, it may carry a more universal appeal. It promises hope for redemption and reward, to anyone who suffers and who yet remains faithful. It insists that God is doing something new.

## **Gospel: John 13:31-33, 34-35**

These verses place us at the last supper. Judas has left, and Jesus addresses the others: "Now I am glorified, and God is glorified in me. I will leave you soon. Here is a new commandment: Love one another. You must love one another as I have loved you. People will know you are my disciples by your love for one another." In the liturgical context of the Easter season, these verses refer not only to Christ's Passion, but also to his Ascension. Christ is only visible in the world through the church, and only if we obey his commandment. This commandment places a radical demand upon us. Recognizing the superhuman dimensions of Christ's love for us, nonetheless we are to love as he has loved. How is such a thing possible? We can only succeed with the help of the Holy Spirit. God makes all things new.

### **To Be Shared**

The love of God is too big to be contained. When we receive it, we need to share it. Paul and Barnabas cannot help but share the Gospel of Christ because they have experienced the love of Christ and cannot contain it. Even in the face of hardship, Paul and Barnabas cannot contain themselves. Maybe you've met someone that is really excited about a new restaurant, music album, or event. If we do this with minor, worldly things, what prevents us from doing this with the love of God?

It may in fact be the fear of persecution or suffering. After all, the first reading prepares us for that. But the second reading gives us a spoiler for the end of the story: Christ wins! Every tear is wiped away. Heaven and earth are renewed. God's love wins and saves the day. Hardships are temporary, but the love of God stands firm forever. When we share that love, God is glorified on earth, and as more people experience that love, they share it and God is further glorified. Don't try to contain the love that God gives you; it cannot be contained. It must be shared.

**Jesus, sometimes it is so difficult to love my enemies. Those who wrong me, who persecute me, who don't understand me. Yet, you call me to love them as if they were my friends. How must I do that? Please reveal to me today and every day how it is that I can love deeper and more freely...for, you make all things new. Make me new again today. Amen.**