

## Reflection for Sunday, May 9, 2004: 5th week in Easter.

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### Date

2004-05-09

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### Reading 1

Acts 14:21-27

### Psalm

Psalms 145:8-9, 10-11, 12-13

### Reading 2

Revelation 21:1-5a

### Gospel

John 13:31-33a, 34-35

### Lectionary Number

54. Year C, Easter.

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## Reflection:

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### PRE-PRAYERING

Shakespeare gave us a stark image of love in one of his sonnets. He wrote that love is not love when it alters because it finds alterations. It looks upon the stormy times, but is never shaken.

Jesus spoke less poetically yet more insistently in his final words to his disciples before living his last moments in a gesture of love. Paul and Barnabas will live their love despite being persecuted and threatened. We face the relationship between our believing in Jesus and the challenge of loving in fact and fidelity.

We can pray to receive God's love for us and the love of family and friends. In our part of the world we celebrate also the love of our Mothers on this Mother's Day. God's love is so like that of most mothers. As children we have been encouraged, forgiven, nourished, inspired, corrected and welcomed home at all times. We can pray with memories, humbling experiences of God's motherly ways with us all. We can pray also to love in response to God's love for us and Jesus' command to care for his sisters and brothers.

### REFLECTION

We hear the further adventures of the early apostles in today's First Reading. Luke presents Paul and Barnabas as having success and resistance. As in his Gospel, Luke pictures the gestures of healing as invitations to be received by some and rejected by others. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus would do something and the responses were praiseful amazement by some and fearful suspicion from others.

Paul and Barnabas have been preaching and recently have raised a man who had been crippled from birth. Some responded by believing they were gods, Zeus and Hermes. Others wanted to stone them. What we hear in today's reading is an account of their fidelity to their ministry no matter what the responses. They begin forming the church's structure by commissioning a group of elders to continue gathering or calling the community together. The original word for Church was "the called" or "summoned." The travelers continue their preaching from town to town and return eventually to announce that

the grace of God through their preaching has reached even to the Gentiles. For Luke, the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon the Apostles to be dispensed through their human instrumentality, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. God's embrace has no geographical or tribal boundaries.

Today's Gospel is from the first chapter of Jesus' Last Discourse. This chapter also begins the second part of John's Gospel which is known as The Book of Glory. It comprises the five chapters of Jesus' last address to his disciples, the two chapters of his Passion and the two chapters narrating his resurrection. Glory in this context might be described as Jesus' being seen for all that he is, loving even onto death and rising even onto life. His love for us in washing the disciples feet or washing this world's humanity with his blood are revelations of who he is for us and who we are to him. Love then is God's glory as seen in every action of Jesus' life.

The message from the lips of Jesus is short and sweet, said while they were all at table, but we can hear them also as the desperate desire of a dying person. "I have only one thing to sum it all up so listen carefully." He has said it in many ways and words before, but now at the end Jesus underlines, in italics, with Bold on, "You are my followers if you love one another."

Love is perhaps the easiest yet most difficult human experience about which to write. Poems, songs, novels, plays, paintings, books and essays try, but never quite say it all just right. Jesus did it; does it now. Mothers, fathers, friends, strangers all have the capacity to reveal something about what Jesus is doing and asking. I am fussing to give examples, clear images, but the humbling reality is that they will all limp and fade.

No greater love is there than the laying down of one's life for even one other person. Laying down one's life does not necessarily mean expiring. Jesus did of course give his life many times, but ultimately did expire. His every moment was a laying out for us even to his death.

During this Easter time it might be well to respond to Jesus' commandment by reflecting upon how love involves dying even in the littlest ways. Love and Justice go together well, but loving is not a just experience. If we expect to get back what we lay out, that is a business not a love relationship. Love is unjust then, that is correct. We are loved by God unjustly in a sense. If we feel worthy of being loved by someone, then we are rewarded, appreciated and paid back.

What Jesus is asking of us is impossible if we expect to love others as much and faithfully as he loved us. What is possible is to allow ourselves to be laid out for by Jesus and then to advance in laying out for those to whom he offers us. Loving takes time, takes chances, takes opportunities, takes rejection, takes awareness, but does not take, grab, demand, measure, but receives.

Jesus did not write poems or plays, but lived his lay-out life. He has laid it out clearly in front of us. I wish I had written a beautiful poem which could make your eyes water. Instead I find myself reflecting that I desire to lay myself a little more out for my Jesuit brothers here in my house. I would like to be a part of that glory Jesus spoke about, the glory of being loved and loving in Him, just an inch more. I do know what being loved is by God and by others. I would love to love like mothers do or fathers or God. I will continue learning what it feels like for Larry to love. Thanks Mama Gillick, thank you from us eight kids, including Dad.

Your Angel

Once upon a time, a child was ready to be born. One day he asked God,

"You're sending me to earth tomorrow...how am I going to live there when I'm so small and helpless?"

God replied, "Among the many angels, I chose one for you. She will be waiting for you and she will take care of you."

"But tell me, here in Heaven, I don't do anything else but sing and smile - that's enough for me to be happy."

God replied, "Your angel will sing for you and will smile for you every day. You will feel your angel's love and be very happy."

The child responded, "And how am I going to be able to understand when people talk to me if I don't know the language that people talk?"

God replied, "Your angel will tell you the most beautiful words with patience and care."

"And what am I going to do when I want to talk to you?"

God Replied, "Your angel will place your hands together and teach you how to pray."

"Who will protect me from the bad things on earth?"

God replied, "Your angel will defend and protect you with its own life."

"I will be sad when I don't see you anymore."

God replied, "Your angel will talk to you about me and she will teach you the way for you to come back to me. I will always be next to you."

At that moment there was much peace in Heaven, but voices from earth could be heard, and the child asked softly, "God, if I'm about to leave now, please tell me my angel's name."

God replied, "Your angel's name is of no importance, you will call your

angel Mother."

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