

Sermon 23

St Philip and St James
Palma de Mallorca Spain
15th May 2022
5th Sunday of Easter

**Theme: Loving one another is a true mark of
discipleship.**



**TEXTS: Acts 11:1-18
Revelation 21:1-6
John 13:31-35**

Introduction

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. Today we are in the fifth Sunday of Easter and we are still celebrating the risen Christ. Today's gospel reading takes us back to what happened on the last supper before he was betrayed. Jesus knows that the time for going back to his father has arrived. He organizes the last supper with his disciples, washes their feet, and uttered his last piece of advice. I would rather call this; **The Last Sermon at the Table**. In the ancient Greek culture the last words of a dying person were treated with great respect because the Greeks believed that when you were on your deathbed you had a higher level of consciousness and you were more

likely to utter a prophecy or words of wisdom. I don't know with other cultures but in my culture the last words of a dying person are respected and treated with uttermost care because they reflect the wishes of the deceased and there is a belief that failure to obey them will result in a curse. Since today's gospel reading is the central text of my sermon, I will focus on Jesus' final words at the table.

Exegesis of the Text

Today's gospel begins with the conversation that took place soon after Judas has left the table to betray Jesus. Instead of focusing on the fall of Judas and the painful events that were to unfold, Jesus decides to focus on his mission and prepares his disciples about what was going to come. Successful people in life succeed because they remain focused on their goal and objectives regardless of obstacles and this is equally true of successful instructions. This is what happens with Jesus; he knew exactly what was going to happen and how it was going to happen. Nothing was hidden from his sight but he had to pay much attention to preparing his disciples for the future mission. Firstly, he

speaks about being glorified and glorifying God which in John gospel's language is a reference to his elevation on a cross. Then he goes on to tell them that he was about to leave them behind to a destination where they were not able to follow him. All this information was preparing them for the most important part of the conversation—that is when he gives them a new commandment. “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” This is why many bible translations have given this passage the title: **New Commandment**. The Latin translation which is called the Vulgate, the title is *Mandatum*

Novum-this where the word Maundy Thursday is taken from. Was this commandment new? Certainly the new commandment is not entirely new because the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament talks about loving your neighbor and later expands it to loving strangers. What then is new about Jesus' commandment? The difference between the new commandment and earlier pronouncements is that in the new commandment Jesus provides a clear model of love that he requires. Love for Jesus means serving one another, even in the most menial tasks. It also means heroic acts of great risk; it extends even to the point of giving one's life for another. We have seen this happening recently in Ukraine when citizens from other countries

would volunteer to go to fight and do humanitarian work in the war zones instead of remaining in the comforts of their peaceful homes. This is a typical example of giving out one's life for others. Eric Fromm, a German Social Psychologist has to say, "Love isn't something natural. Rather it requires discipline, concentration, patience, faith, and the overcoming of narcissism. It isn't a feeling, it is a practice." This is what we see in Jesus earlier before he gave the new commandment. At the last supper, he demonstrates his love for the same disciples who will fail him miserably. He washes and feeds Judas who will betray him, Peter who will deny him, and the rest of the disciples who will abandon him in his hour of greatest distress. Such a love

is not based on the merit of the recipients. Jesus is commanding his disciples to do the same. Katharine Hepburn, an American actress would say, “love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get, only with what you are expecting to give, which is everything” Therefore, the best way of understanding Christian love is looking at Jesus’ life and actions.

Application

Brothers and sisters, loving those with whom we agree with, is the easy part, but loving the rest of the people we come in contact with is a much harder proposition. We live in a world where people live with broken hearts because of what had happened to them in the past and they find it difficult to love. However, Amy Poehler (Pola), and American actress, comedian, writer, producer and director say, “continue to share your heart with people even if it has been broken.” Our lives have been defined by certain identity boundaries that have made it difficult for us to love to those outside them. This is what Peter was told in a vision that took at Joppa in Acts 11:1-18. Jewish kosher

laws and purity codes had created boundaries and barriers that had made it difficult for them to share God's love with those people living outside those boundaries. In the vision, God is dismantling those boundaries before Peter to enable him to fulfil the great commission of taking the gospel to the end of the world. How was he going to reach out to the unclean people without breaking those purity boundaries? Eckhart Tolle (tol) (German teacher) says that, "to love is to recognize yourself in another." True discipleship is not by reciting the entire bible from Genesis to Revelations, it is not by singing hymns very well with great melodious voices, it is not by preaching the most theological or

eloquent sermons, it is not by being the most pious person in the society, and it is not by receiving Holy Communion fifty-two Sundays a year; but it is by loving one another. Remember Jesus' final words, "by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Amen.

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