

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.”

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‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.’ Now is the moment where our Lord will become silent, and submit to the will of his Father in heaven, for this is indeed His glory, and not only His, but the only glory, for to do God’s will is to accomplish in creation, in time, the uncreated, timeless, and most glorious love of God. In love for us, we hear, the Son of Man, in His bloody Passion, shall be glorified.

It is times like this, the little while before one dies, that often people say what is most important; they make a sort of last offering of words; void of any joking, void of any kidding; they bequeath words of Truth to those whom they are soon to leave. It is a deadly serious moment, and many people are remembered by their dying words. Indeed, many people can tell in detail the last thoughts and conversations of passed loved ones. When time is short, we say what needs saying. And indeed for Our Lord, time is short; He is soon to leave his disciples, for in this reading we are thrown back into the Holy Week we not long ago witnessed.

‘Little children, Yet a little while I am with you.’ ‘A little while still, and you will see no longer.’ We return to the upper room to receive this last parting gift of Our Savior.

So we listen, we lean in close at the table of our Lord to hear what he will say to us. *‘A new commandment I give to you.’* Yes, something new. Tell us Lord! *‘That you love one another.’*

'But Lord, that is not new at all.' It is odd, isn't it? Our Lord offers up this '*New Commandment*,' this 'New Word' and what is it but the old word? Did he not say to the Scribes already: "*The most important commandment is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* The second is this: '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*' There is no other commandment greater than these."?

And that commandment was not even new when he said it then, for it is written in the Law of Moses: '*You shall not steal from your neighbor; you shall not oppress, you shall not do evil; but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*'

So old was this '*New Commandment*' of our Lord that when Jesus answered the scribe before, the scribe replied: "*You are right, Teacher. You have truly said [...] to love one's neighbor as oneself, that this is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.*"

Far from new, it is common knowledge. And yet Our Lord continues: '*as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*' What is new? It is the 'I' that is new, the 'I am,' that is Jesus, the ever rising sun. He is what makes this commandment new. No longer are we to love our neighbor as ourselves; no; now we love our neighbor as Christ loved us.

And what is this love Christ has shown for us? Here we enter into the deep mysteries of the Church; for all Church history, all theology, is little else than a two thousand year long meditation on the Love of Jesus.

We hear about Love often these days. Whether we are talking about bombings or war or abortion or gender debates, the answer is always 'love.' We are not supposed to judge, we are just supposed to 'love.'

This secular notion of 'love' is nothing more than a glorified apathy; to love merely means to not care what others do, and accept that they do it; the Christian dogmatician has a word for this apathetic

acceptance of anyone's behavior: hate. It is those you hate whom you do not care what they do, and what befalls them. We care deeply about our children's and friends decision, for we love them, but to those whom we would rather live without, we do not care if they marry or do not, if they grow fat or starve, 'whether they live or die.'

This worldly love Our Lord has not a moment for. When faced with the divine Word in which we *'live and move and have our being,'* such notions of 'love' are blasphemous.

But then, if not a generic, well-meaning acceptance of others, what is this Love of Our Lord Christ? To be honest, it is a thing too profound and too beautiful to articulate concisely: but perhaps the old theologian Charles Williams came closest to the Christian truth when an old friend asked him if he had his love and loyalty. Williams replied: "Love you? I am you."

For this is the Love of Our Lord Jesus: it is not that He is friendly to you; that He is kind, even supremely kind to His neighbor; that He has a deep and heart-felt affection and compassion for those around Him; but that He has become one with his neighbor; in love, He has united Himself to all whom He loves. You ask Jesus, 'do you love me, Lord?' He responds: "Love you? I am you."

Indeed, Our Lord in love has united Himself to all mankind, to each and every one individually. He has taken on all that is ours, and now He bears it as his own. *'For surely he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows.'* And why has He carried them, even as His own? That He, dear Christian, might suffer for them the suffering which was destined for you.

'He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.' *'Now is the Son of Man glorified.'* Now let your mind once again recall his dreadful Passion for us.

See him drug before godless courts, see how they mock him, how commoners tell lies about him; see how he is struck by Roman guards, his sacred face bloodied. To be lied about, to be abused. One can almost hear that liar and murderer David looking up from Sheol at his God's suffering, and

crying out: 'No! That mockery, those strikes, the ridicule; I deserve them, they are for me!' But Jesus responds to his father David: "For you? I am you."

See the Christ stripped naked, humiliated, laughed at for being the only man to ever have been free of malice, of guile, of deceit. He was scourged, his flesh torn, his blood scattered far, whipping across the mocking crowds. One can almost hear that carnal man of flesh, Solomon, crying out from the pit: "No Lord! Let this not befall you! It is my flesh which I indulged all my days with food and women; I deserve to have my flesh torn, to have it destroyed; those whippings and scourgings, they are for me!" But Jesus responds to king Solomon: "For you? I am you."

Now he is stretched out upon the wood of the cross, his shoulder pulled out of joint to bring his hand to the length of the beam. Now the nail is on his hand, and heathen might hammers a nail deeper, and deeper into those blameless hands

which purified lepers and gave sight to the blind. Does your soul not cry out: "No Lord! That is my cross! Those are my nails! This is my death! *Lord let it not be so!* They were all, all of them, meant for me!" But Jesus responds: "For you? I am you."

"I am you, '*for ye are my friends*'. And now all your suffering, all your guilt, all your humiliation, all your shame. It is mine, and I will bear it all, I will suffer it. '*For greater love hath no man but this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.*'"

Such love, such suffering: the sun is blotted out, the world is darkened, as if heaven cannot bear to witness the death of the Son of Man for his love of sinful men. [His love of humanity. His love of you, dear Christian. His friend.]

All this was happening in His agony, on His cross. The heavens blinded in grief for the suffering innocent; all the dead crying out in shame; Our Lord, taking everything upon himself, to lay down his life for us. This is the cosmic drama of the Passion.

Now our Lord is dead. It is silent.

But remember the words of Jesus: *'I lay down my life, that I may take it up again.'*

Now we return to the season of Easter. Christ is risen from the dead, never to die again, to live unto the ages of ages, filling all things with His glory; for having illumined our hearts and minds through the giving of His Spirit in the sacramental water of Baptism, we are no longer what we once were, we are no longer old men, but new men; so no longer do we harken to the old commands of the flesh, but the Spirit in us pours forth the New Commandment of Christ, *'That we love one another, even as I have loved you.'* And this still *'for a little while, for then you will see me.'*

We will see Our Lord, either in life or in death, it does not matter which, for with glorified eyes, we will see *'the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.'* With sanctified ears we will hear *'a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'*

Will you be surprised on that day? That day which we all look for, for which we daily pray, *'Amen, Come, Lord Jesus'*? No preparation will prepare you enough; for with the new heavens and the new earth, you will have a new body, [for it matters not the state of your body when you face a weak and laughable death; whether you fall from a cancer in your corpse or a bullet in your youthful frame; from a failing mind or from the malice of an enemy, it is a weak and laughable death; you fear in the moment of death, but the new man within you is without fear, only derision, he *laughs at the future*] for Christ will raise us on the last day. And of this newness of glory for which we have been set apart, we cannot understand now, *'but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.'*

Indeed, in our baptism, we will be like him, Sons of the Most High. For remember what he has said to us: 'I am you.' And so too, we are Him. He took our shame, our guilt, our misery; then we will take on His immortality, His glory, His unimaginable splendor. A new heavens, a new earth, a new humanity, in the image of the New Adam, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, the ever-blessed.

Death will come upon us all. And surely at that time a fear will strike you. But within you, O blessed ones, is Wisdom, the women of Proverbs, who *laughs*. And you will look upon your coming death, which is the destiny of all mortal men, and speak the words of your Lord:

'Now is the Son of Man Glorified.'

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*Preached by Pastor
Fields*

*Sermon texts: Acts
11:1-18, Revelation 21:1-7, John 13:31-35*