

Homily of Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year C, 2025

Acts 14:21-27; Psalm 145:8-13; Revelation 21:1-5; John 13:31-35

Today's readings draw our attention to the foundational virtues that help us to live a good Christian life. The virtues are faith, hope, and love.

First reading: Paul and Barnabas “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.”

Second reading: “I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ... ‘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 will 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 will make all things new.’”

Gospel: “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Faith, hope, and love are called **theological or supernatural virtues because they** are “gifts infused (directly given) by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life” (CCC 1813). The term “theological virtues” comes from *theo*, Greek word for god, and *virtus*, Latin word meaning goodness or moral excellence. Faith, hope, and love are the foundation of a relationship with God. Without faith, hope and love we are incapable of relating with God and living out the other virtues.

The measure with which we open ourselves to receive faith, hope, and love from God is the measure with which we practice our Christianity. See how signal powered devices and gadgets work. Good signal reception brings about efficiency. Poor signal reception brings about poor performance. Bad reception brings about ineffective performance. When there is zero reception, there is no network connection. Our relationship with God and Christian witnessing follow the same rule.

In the first reading, Paul and Barnabas strengthened the Christians who were persecuted. Our faith in God is tested by difficulties and hardships. Paul and Barnabas encourage us to persevere in the faith in whatever trying situation we find ourselves. Hebrews 10:38 says, “My just one shall live by faith and if he draws back, I take no pleasure in him.” Let us strive on and not draw back.

The second reading is an invitation to hope and to look forward to the blessings God has in stock for his faithful ones. For those who hope in God and remain steadfast in their times of tribulations, God promises to wipe every tear from their eyes, and make all things new. May God fulfill his words and promises among us who hope in him. St. Paul encourages us in Romans 5:2-5, “... hope does not disappoint ...” Isaiah assures us, “They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on eagles’ wings. They will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

In today's gospel, Jesus gives us a new commandment, "As I have loved you, so you should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." The concept of love of neighbor existed before Jesus' teaching. Love of neighbor before Jesus' new commandment of love can be referred to as *quid pro quo* (something for something) love or transactional love, that is love in return for love. In Luke 6:32-33, Jesus asks, "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same."

The new commandment of love is Christ-like love, which is self-sacrificial and selfless. Expressions of love that are bereft of self-sacrifice and selflessness are insufficient. Jesus expands the meaning of "neighbor" and redefines the word to include anyone in need. Jesus makes this expansion and redefinition very clear with the Parable of the Good Samaritan as his answer to a lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29-37). Wherever a love relationship is determined by "what is in it for me," that love relationship is not genuine and is bound to fail. Jesus challenges us to progress to the new commandment of love.

As mentioned earlier, without faith, hope, and love, we are incapable of relating with God and witnessing Jesus. Faith knocks on heaven's door, hope opens heaven's door, and love receives heaven's favors! None of the three virtues exists independent of the other. We pray for the grace to open up to God to melt us, mold us, and fill us with faith, hope, and love, and "Behold, [he] will make all things new" (a new relationship with him and a new life in Christ). Amen.

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