

**Fifth Sunday of Easter – Year C**  
**(May 2, 2010)**

Have you ever noticed how exhilarating novelty can be? New things? Why just looking forward to an event, a party, a celebration, a wedding or anniversary, can sometimes outdo the joy of the occasion itself. And yet how quickly the new becomes routine. Commercialism in our culture is built on keeping our sense of novelty at a high pitch. Just think of what you see every day on television. Last year's model is no good anymore. We have a better one now that you just have to buy. We see something like this at Christmas time when children are thrilled with the new toys that Santa brings. But just a week later the toys are strewn around the house, the novelty worn off. We thrill at new thresholds, but the thrill doesn't last. Many of us can remember a number of years ago when we saw the first human being set foot on the moon. What a thrill! But now after many people have followed, even walked in space and gone well beyond the moon, we've become quite blasé about it all. The sense of wonder has gone.

Well, our readings today talk about new things. They tell us that certain things are part of the gift of God, God's gifted newness to all of us, and they should never become "old hat."

The wonder, for instance, of new converts. Paul speaks joyfully about it at Antioch in our first reading and repeatedly in his letters. And the thrill for Paul never wears off. In spite of danger, persecution, and imprisonment, he continues to rejoice in the new things that God is doing. Each year at Easter we welcome new converts to our church, to our faith, to share with us the good things that God is constantly doing for all of us. But how easy it is to become used to their presence, forgetting that their faith journey continues after the thrill of the Easter Vigil – and so does ours! These new disciples are part of Easter. They express the perennial newness of the Church, ancient though it may be, always calling us to something new. Its message, like hope, springs eternal.

And what of Jesus' new commandment? He tells us that our love for one another, even within the Church, is to be a witness to an unbelieving world. "They will know that you are my disciples by your love for one another." I don't know about you, but I have to examine my conscience

daily to see if that in fact is the case. I suppose we would be a true sign to the world around us if we really lived it. But how easy it is to settle for negativism and pettiness. We have no shortage of ethnic slurs, racial dislike, ill feelings toward minorities. We would like to believe we are free of sexism, but are we?

Now the newness of the command that Jesus gives is at least partially, maybe entirely, in the motivation for observing it. "Love one another as I have loved you." "As I have loved you." We mirror Christ's love in our own love. That, I think, goes beyond loving our neighbor as ourselves and that's what makes it new! Christ loved us unto his death. That's a sobering thought. How willing am I to give my life for another? And the motivation is simply that that is the way that Christ loved us. We are not without examples. Remember St. Maximilian Kolbe? He changed places with another prisoner who was to be executed so that the other man, a husband and father, could return to his family. Greater love than this no one has. Remember the awful things that happened at Columbine High School when two students went berserk and started shooting others in the school. One teacher threw herself in front of a child to protect her from the bullets and she herself was killed

And we are all aware, I'm sure, of other instances closer to home, not so spectacular, perhaps, but genuine examples of how we mirror the love of Jesus in our own lives: parents who make great sacrifices to assure their children of a decent home and good education; a husband who patiently cares for a wife who suffers from Alzheimer's disease; a wife who exercises tough love to get her alcoholic husband into treatment and on the road to recovery. I'm sure you all could add your own instances, including personal ones, of the kind of love I am talking about.

An author I read recently, commenting on the passage from the Book of Revelation that we heard, says this: John's vision of the new heaven and the new earth remains in the future only because we have failed to live it in our present. Jesus has risen from the dead and now all things are new. "The old order has passed away." We have entered the age of fulfillment. If we expect this to be Pollyanna-land, we are badly mistaken. It is within our power, however, to fashion a world, a country, a neighborhood, a family where there is genuine love for one another and sincere concern for the

well-being of all.

The problem is: the culture we live in does not always foster such unselfishness, and people who live this love often stand out from the crowd. Other people might stand in awe of them or be surprised. Some might even disdain their manner of living. But they nonetheless show by it that they are God's people and God does indeed dwell with them.

We all have our part to play in creating a new heaven and a new earth, not in some vague, undetermined future, but right here and now. It may be a large part; it may be a small one, but play it we must. As we pray together today, let's ask ourselves, as we ask God, what can we, here at Holy Trinity, do to help construct a better world. How can we help God bring about a new heaven and a new earth?