

5th Sunday of Easter - C
Acts 14:21-27;
Revelation 21:1-5a;
John 13:31-33a, 34-35
Little Flower - 4/28/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

Almost two weeks ago, we were all stunned by the bombings at the Boston Marathon. I feel a great sadness for all those whose lives were directly affected by the bombings, especially for those who died and those who suffered serious injuries and their families. It is the same kind of sadness I feel when I see broken marriages and broken families, when I see families struggling to survive financially, when I see victims of violence and abuse.

How different the world would be if we all tried our best to live love in our lives, first for family and friends, but not only for family and friends, but for all people. How different the world would be if instead of building walls and barriers between ourselves and others, we all worked to tear down the walls and barriers that separate us from one another. How different the world would be if we all became instruments of reconciliation, if we all became peacemakers and healers.

This was Jesus' message to us. If we ask why Jesus was put to death, the easiest answer is that Jesus died for love: he was put to death because he lived and preached love as the only ultimately decisive reality in life.

We often talk about Jesus' two great commandments of love, to love God first, i.e., to love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, and our whole mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. However, neither of these commandments was new with Jesus. Both came from the Old Testament, the first from the Book of Deuteronomy and the second from the Book of Leviticus. What was new was Jesus joining them together. For Jesus, the two are inseparable: love of God without love of neighbor is impossible.

However, in today's Gospel, Jesus did give us a new commandment: "*As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.*" At the Last Supper, Jesus raised the bar for his disciples. No longer would it be sufficient for them to love others as they loved themselves. They were to love others as Jesus had loved them. Jesus' love was totally self-revealing, self-giving, self-sacrificing. Since Jesus is both divine and human, Jesus is the perfect human being. Therefore, Jesus should be the model, the exemplar, for every human being.

Because Jesus gave his new commandment at the Last Supper, which was an intimate setting, we might be tempted to apply it primarily to our personal relationships. However, Jesus also said, "*For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same?*" [Mt. 5:46]. Christian love is expansive by definition. This was the point of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus wants us to see and love all people as brothers and sisters in the human family and all Christians as brothers and sisters in the family of God. If everyone did this, what a different world this would be!

My brothers and sisters, today we celebrated First Communion at the 10:30 a.m. Mass. It is always a beautiful thing to see in the faces of small children their faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. However, at the same time, the Eucharist embodies the meaning of Jesus' commandment to love one another as he loves us. Jesus gives us Himself in the Eucharist, just as he gave Himself on the cross, so that we might become his Body, i.e., one with him and with one another, and so that we might give ourselves, i.e., pour out our lives, in love and service for others.