

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's readings focus on faith, hope, and love.

The Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the beginnings of the church. Throughout Acts, the apostles and disciples went from place to place proclaiming the Gospel and creating small communities of believers and then returning to previous places they had visited to strengthen their faith. It is very evident that the early church was a missionary church.

Pope Francis has often said that the church always has been and always will be a missionary church. Therefore, as individuals and as a community, we are called to share the good news of Jesus with others and to support one another in faith both by our words and by our example. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "*And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?*" [Rom. 10:14].

One verse in today's reading really struck me: "*They 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.'*" I think that sometimes as Christians we want to believe that faith and life should be easy. This verse is a powerful reminder that both life and faith will have many challenges and hardships. Therefore, we need to develop the virtues of perseverance and endurance. This is why it is so important that we support one another in faith. This is why being part of a Christian community is so important.

Today's second reading is an invitation to hope. Today's reading from Revelation is a description of God's kingdom. The heavenly Jerusalem, God's kingdom, will come down from heaven adorned like a bride. The ultimate gift of the kingdom will be fulness of life that will come from complete intimacy with God and with others: "*God will always be with them as their God.*" Therefore, the kingdom of God will bring complete joy and happiness: "*He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, (for) the old order has passed away.*"

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls us to love one another as he has loved us. Jesus would also say a little later "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*" [Jn. 15:13]. What makes this commandment new is the measure of love. Jesus does not call us to simply love others as we love ourselves. We are called to love one another as he loves us. We know that Jesus' love for us is self-revealing, self-giving, and self-sacrificing. Therefore, our love for others must be self-revealing, self-giving, and self-sacrificing. In today's Gospel, Jesus also said, "*This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" We know that in the early church, two things drew people to Christianity: the willingness of Christians to die for their faith, demonstrating their love for God,<sup>1</sup> and the love of Christians for one another.<sup>2</sup>

My brothers and sisters, today's Gospel comes from the Gospel of John. A wonderful story from the end of his life makes it clear that for John love was most important:

When the holy Evangelist John was living at Ephesus and was far advanced in years, his disciples would carry him into church. Being unable to give a lengthy sermon, at each gathering he was accustomed simply to repeat the words, "Children, love one another." His disciples and the brethren who were present, upon hearing these same words repeatedly, became impatient and asked, "Master, why do you always say the same thing?" John's reply was wholly in harmony with his heart: "Because it is the Lord's commandment; and if you did nothing more, it would suffice."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Tertullian, *Apology*, Chapter 50, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0301.htm>.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Chapter 39.

<sup>3</sup>"From the Commentary of St. Jerome on the Epistle to the Galatians," Book 3, ch. 6, in *The Hours of the Divine Office in English and Latin*, Volume One, (Collegeville, Minn: The Liturgical Press, 1963), p.'s 1209f.