

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Fifth Sunday of Easter. Today's reading from Acts and today's Gospel suggest two different models of Church.

In the first model, the Church is called to be a community of shared mission, vision, and values. The readings from Acts of the Apostles during the Easter season certainly exemplify this model. The early Church was almost completely focused on proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. In today's reading from Acts, for example, after making many new disciples, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to strengthen the faith of the disciples in those towns.

In the second model, the Church is called to be a community of intimacy. St. John's Gospel is the Gospel of intimacy rooted in God's love for us in Jesus Christ. However, intimacy in John's Gospel is not so much emotional intimacy but communion. As we read in Acts of the Apostles, *"The community of believers was of one heart and mind..."* [4:32a].

The problem is that many Catholics and other Christians see this as an either/or choice. Although we may have a preference for one or the other model, both are essential.

In the early days of Christianity, two realities drew non-Christians to Christianity: the willingness of Christians to be martyred for their faith and the love of Christians for one another. These parallel the two models of the Church. People were willing to be martyred because they were fully committed to living and sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the early days of the Church, non-Christians would often comment, "See how those Christians love one another." As Jesus said in today's Gospel, *"This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Today's Gospel defines the love to which Christians are called: *"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."* Most of us are familiar with Jesus' two great commandments: love God above all and love your neighbor as yourself. Many mistakenly believe those two commandments were new with Jesus. However, both came from the Old Testament. What was new was that Jesus linked them inseparably.

However, in today's Gospel, Jesus raised the bar. The measure of our love for others should not be our love for ourselves but Jesus' love for us. As John would also write, *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends"* [15:13]. In other words, if we are to love as Jesus loved, our love must be sacrificial: we must be self-revealing, self-giving, and self-sacrificing.

Several years ago, there was a shooting at a STEM High School in Colorado. The lone casualty was Kendrick Castillo, a high school senior. According to an article from Catholic News Service, "Kendrick died while charging the shooter to save his friends." His father said, "I wish he had gone and hid...but that's not his character. His character is about protecting people, helping people." *"This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends"* [Jn. 15:12-13].

My brothers and sisters, today's reading from Revelation reminds us that as Christians, we must never lose sight of our ultimate goal and destiny: the kingdom of God where God will always be with us as our God and where there will be no more sin, suffering, sickness, or death. When we die, we will anticipate the coming of God's kingdom in heaven. However, we can anticipate it even now if we help our community become of one mind and one heart, if we are self-revealing, self-giving, and self-sacrificing, and if we share the Good News of Jesus in word and deed both within and outside our community.