

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER [C]

Acts 14: 21 - 27

Revelation 21: 1 - 5

John 13: 31 - 35

I'm sure we've all had the experience of the phone ringing at just the wrong moment, but feeling I've got to answer it just in case it's important.

You pick it up, there's a pause at the other end, and then a foreign voice invites you to take part in a survey: it certainly tests the patience, doesn't it?

Let's imagine for a moment, though, that we were taking part in a genuine, serious survey; but with just one question posed: 'What do you think will happen to you when you die?'

My instinct - based on experience - is that many Catholics would say they're not good enough to be with the Lord; now, let alone after I die.

Maybe someone among us here today is thinking: my sin is so great, I'm far from God; I don't have the courage to go back, to believe that God can welcome me, and that He's waiting for me, of all people.

But God is indeed waiting for you; He asks of you only the courage to go to Him. So, don't be afraid, go to Him, He's straining His eyes; looking out for you, like the Father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, so that He can run to embrace you; so that He can take care of everything.

We hear many 'offers' from the world around us; but let's take up God's offer instead: His 'offer' is a caress of love.

For Him, we're not numbers, we're important, indeed we're the most important thing to Him; even if we're sinners, we're what's closest to His heart.

In a few minutes we'll say in the Creed that I believe: "On the third day [Jesus] rose again according to the Scriptures."

And yet, in reality, it's as if a lot of us are living our lives without hope in our hearts: not believing in our hearts, only saying with our lips, that the Death and Resurrection of Jesus are the heart of our hope.

Another facet of this lack of a connection between the Death and Resurrection of the Lord, and our hope of eternal life, was illustrated for me a few years ago by a Priest who said to me: 'Don't miss out on the good things of this life in case you miss out on them in the next.'

He said it with a smile; but he really meant it.

His was a world-weary reaction to the salvation, the fullness of life, in this world, and in the world to come, Jesus holds out to us.

The problem is that sometimes we want to save ourselves, and we believe we can do it by basing our salvation - our security - on money, possessions, our health and strength, our social standing.

Then we think: 'I'm secure; I have it all; no worries!'

And yet, we're not. We can only be saved, and given everlasting security, by the love of the Crucified One, not by our own power.

And, because we're saved by his love, it should make us men and women of hope: "For our hope is in the living God, who is the Saviour of all people." 1 Tim. 4: 10
I think those mind-sets I've described are a sign of the malaise the Church has found herself in in recent times.

Of course she's been preaching and teaching the faith in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus: the fact that He rose bodily from the dead, and is alive by His Spirit in the Church.

But, sadly, I feel we've somehow become disconnected from that living faith: instead, a 'watered down' faith has seeped into our lives as Christians.

I've just read a book by Andrea Torielli entitled: 'Francis: Pope Of a New World.'

There, I found expressed by Pope Francis when he was Cardinal Bergoglio, what I've been feeling for a while; that the Church is suffering from a 'spiritual worldliness.'

"We need [he says] to come out of ourselves. We need to avoid the spiritual sickness of a Church that is wrapped up in her own world: when a Church becomes like this, she grows sick."

And, in his first homily, addressed to the Cardinals but, through them, to you and me, he explained what causes that 'spiritual worldliness': "When we journey without the Cross, when we build without the Cross, when we profess Christ without the Cross, we are not disciples of the Lord, we are worldly."

For, however hard we may try to avoid it, the Cross has to be faced, contemplated, and understood.

Understood as that which underpins those words of command Jesus speaks to us in the Gospel: "Now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." Jn. 13: 34 - 35

Then we'll understand the Cross as the seed of the Resurrection: because, as Paul forthrightly says: "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." 1 Cor. 15: 17

Sadly, we so often live as if He's still in His stone-cold tomb; instead of realising that the Christian life is giving witness with joy, as Jesus did.

And we can only do that if we've encountered the Crucified and Risen One - Jesus - in our own lives.

We need to rediscover - or perhaps discover for the first time in our lives? - the goodness, tenderness, and mercy of the Lord: for the: "Lord is full of tenderness and mercy." Jm. 5: 11

That's His nature; that's why He asks us to love one another as He first loved us.

He wants us to reflect His goodness, tenderness, and mercy through the way we follow Him in this life, so that we naturally attract and draw other people into His loving embrace.

Paul, in his hymn about God's love in 1 Corinthians 13, says that: "Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity." 1 Cor. 13: 12

Our journey through this life can sometimes seem like a 'puzzling reflection in a mirror:' however, we live by faith, hope and, above all, love.

And: "So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me:" Gal. 2: 20 safe in the knowledge that when my 'earthly body' gives up, the Lord will give me my resurrection body in the eternal life He's prepared for me.

I'll not be a disembodied spirit vaguely floating around somewhere up there in Heaven, because Heaven isn't going to be like that.

Just think; when we pray the Our Father we say: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

We're actually praying that what we've heard this evening/morning from the Book of Revelation will come to pass now.

That the Lord will create a new heaven and a new earth, and dwell among us here, with sin and death defeated forever; and with Jesus, The Lamb of God, at its heart

Then, as a beautiful modern hymn says: "Forever He will be the Lamb upon the throne [and] I gladly bow the knee and worship Him alone."

Noel & Tricia Richards: All Heaven Declares

So now, at this Eucharist, let's make an act of faith in Jesus.

Let us say: Lord, I believe. I believe in your love. I believe that your love has saved me. I believe that your love has given me the dignity that I had not. I believe that your love gives me hope.

Jesus said: "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." Jn. 13: 34 - 35