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Commentary on the Gospel: A New Commandment

Gospel for the 5th Sunday of Easter (Cycle C) and commentary.

Gospel (*Jn 13:31-33a. 34-35*)

When he [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you ... A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love

one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Commentary

Jesus is speaking in the Cenacle with his disciples during the Last Supper. Judas Iscariot has just left. The Master makes known that his triumph is now beginning and, at the same time, the glorification of the Father: “Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified.” He does not say that he will be glorified after his Passion, through the Resurrection, but that his glorification begins with his Passion. Glory and the Cross are inseparable.

Following this, he addresses them in an unaccustomed way: “Little children, yet a little while I am with

you.” It is the only time in the Gospel that he calls them “children,” treating them like a father does his young children. He can truly address them like this since, as Jesus himself said, “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30), and “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jn 10:38). Saint Bonaventure gives a theological reason for this reality. “Between the divine Persons a supreme and perfect *circumincessio* reigns,” since “one is in the other and vice versa.” This reality is found in a proper and perfect sense only in God, since only between the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity “do we find the highest unity with distinction, so that we can make this distinction without any mixture and this unity without separation.”[1]

At the same time, Jesus seems to be suggesting that, in an analogous way to his own Life, they too should possess a mysterious participation in

these relations between the divine Persons, in virtue of which they should have a sense of paternity towards their brethren. If Christ, who is “the first-born among many brethren,” (*Rom* 8:29) calls them “little children,” they too should have a father’s heart for their brothers and sisters.

Saint Josemaria gave us some very practical advice in this regard: “Seeing our Lord’s example, show understanding for your brothers with a very big heart, which is not shocked by anything. Truly love them ... By being very human, you will know how to pass over small defects in others, and with motherly understanding you will always see the good side of things. In a graphic, joking way, I’ve pointed out the different impressions people have of the same event depending on whether they look on it affectionately or not. And I told you

(forgive me because it's very graphic) about the child who goes about with his finger in his nose. Visitors remark, 'how vulgar!'; while his mother says, 'he's going to be a researcher!' ... Look on your brothers lovingly and you'll reach the same conclusion, full of charity, that we're all researchers!"[2]

At this moment of special intimacy, Jesus says: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." The precept of love was already found in the Old Testament. But now something new is added. Jesus presents himself as the model and source of that love. His is a love without limits, universal, with the power to transform even suffering and negative circumstances into opportunities to love. To love in this way will be the distinctive sign of his disciples. What a long road we still

have to travel to live as Jesus teaches us!

As Pope Francis reminds us: “We must ask the Lord to make us correctly understand this law of love. How beautiful it is to love one another as true brothers and sisters. How beautiful! Let’s do something today. We may all have likes and dislikes; many of us are perhaps a little angry with someone; then let us say to the Lord: Lord, I am angry with this or that person; I am praying to you for him or her. To pray for those with whom we are angry is a beautiful step towards that law of love. Shall we take it? Let’s take it today!”[3]

[1] Saint Bonaventure, *Sent.* I, d.19, p. 1, q.4.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *Letter*, 29 September 1957, 35. Cited in Ernst Burkhardt - Javier López, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de San Josemaría: estudio de teología espiritual*, vol. 2, Madrid, Rialp, 2011, pp. 331-332.

[3] Pope Francis, General Audience, 12 June 2013.

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