

Homily: May 21, 2022

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

We continue to celebrate our Easters of new life. Our God of love eternally offers new life. Newness often excites. Sometimes newness frightens us and we may ask, “Why all this newness?” Because our God and his Son, Jesus, are love that is alive. Love absolutely cannot stay still and the same. Love, which is our God, always wants to grow, go deeper, and invite something more. Something truly alive—grows, rather than shriveling up and dying. Since we sometimes push back what is truly good and new, we come to our compassionate God, saying:

As I read this Gospel the other day, I puzzled over one of Jesus’ statements. “If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father for the father is greater than I.” Jesus knew that his disciples were confused and feeling sad about him being with them only a little while longer. Now he tells them to rejoice if they really love him—namely, if they really want what is best for him. Sounds contradictory, right?

Jesus is inviting his disciples and us to see him in a new way. He wants us to believe that his complete union with God is better and greater than his limited appearances as a single person. In God and the Holy Spirit, Jesus will be in and with every believer as his dwelling place. Jesus wants them to see him with a new and better perspective.

The other readings today have a similar goal: to help the disciples and ourselves, our Christian identity, and our church in a new way. In the first reading, we read that Paul and Barnabas received thousands of Gentiles as new Christians. Consequently, Paul and Barnabas asked the first Jewish Christians to let go of what they previously thought was absolutely essential for being a good Jew--such as circumcision for men. The new church circumstance was calling Jews who had become Christian, to let go of certain rules—for instance, rules about what they ate and about what they considered clean and unclean. They could no longer consider a visit to homes of non-Jewish people as an unclean act.

This raises a question for us Catholics today. What might we have to let go of, and what do we need to be open to in order to be truer followers of Jesus and be truly

catholic, which means being all-embracing in love? After Vatican II we realized we could no longer force Catholics all over the world to use Latin as their only liturgical language or as the only “holy” language.

The Gospel calls us to believe that the Risen Christ’s Spirit lives in us. Consequently, as truly Christian Catholics we must truly embrace of all other human beings as our sisters and brothers. We need to avoid saying that our nation has to be first and the most powerful. We are a **family** of nations. If one sibling in a family tells the other siblings that they are less important, that family will end up fighting.

All white Catholics ought to rejoice in the beautiful and wide variety of colors and cultures of our sisters and brothers worldwide. We must avoid thinking and saying that one color of skin is better than another color of skin. Race, culture and religion still challenge us Catholics today, especially in Europe and the U.S. The Risen Christ himself and also Paul with Barnabas, faced similar difficulties in establishing true Christianity. Nonetheless, their welcome for all peoples to be Christians continues to grow.

Thanks to Pope Francis, we can hope for renewal in our church. The Synod he requested can be a precious time for us to learn how to be Catholic in a new and truer way. However, such renewal can happen only by letting go of some older ways of thinking, speaking and doing.

The good news in facing the challenges of new catholic life is Jesus’ promise of an advocate. The Holy Spirit will remind us of Jesus’ word. The Spirit’s seven gifts will give us wisdom and strength.