Lectio Divina – 5th Sunday of Easter Year C

Contexts

John's Gospel – in brief

- **Structure of John's Gospel**
  1:1-18: Prologue – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.
  1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs: the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.
  Chapter 6 – Jesus, the Bread of Life is right in the middle of The Book of Signs – a central text in more ways than one!
  13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory: To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.
  21:1-25: Epilogue: Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.
- It is the only Gospel to call Jesus "God".
- Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God's only Son, possessing God's own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God's children. (Raymond Brown SS)
- Jesus is 'The Bread of Life' who feeds, nourishes and sustains the children of God.

John 13:31-35 – things to notice

- The gospel text is the beginning of a longer 'farewell' discourse of Jesus to the disciples.
- It takes place at the end of a meal shared with the disciples which includes Jesus' washing the feet of the disciples, but does not include any mention of the institution of the Eucharist.
- Jesus talks about betrayal and after Judas has left the meal, this discourse begins.
- 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified…' – Judas' betrayal is the beginning of the end, so to speak.
- 'and in him God has been glorified…' – in John's Gospel the crucifixion/resurrection is THE moment of glory, the moment when God's glory is clearly seen in his own outpouring of love for his people.
- 'My little children' – a sign of Jesus' deep affection for the disciples.
- 'I shall not be with you much longer.' – Jesus is preparing to leave his earthly life and return to the Father.
- 'I give you a new commandment…' - this commandment is 'new' because it is not the way the world usually works in terms of human relationships. Can you really 'command' people to love? Here is the idea that God's commandments bring true human freedom. For example, being freed from slavery to greed, one no longer needs to steal, etc.
- The two commands, to love God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and to love neighbour (Leviticus 19:18) are brought together by Jesus as the perfect way to fulfil the following of God.
- 'Just as I have loved you…' - Jesus models in himself this perfect fulfilment of Israel's vocation as God's people and God's desire to bring true freedom to his people.
- His obedience to the 'commands' (will) of God leaves him a truly free person, so free that he can give up even his life on the cross for others.

- '…everyone will know you are my disciples.' – Jesus' message of freedom and salvation is made known only by/through love. It is not a message communicated with violence or with fine theological argument. It is a message communicated in loving.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

The readings of the Easter Season continue to unfold for us the great Easter Mystery - the enduring presence of Jesus among us and what 'new life in Christ' might mean.

The first reading from the Acts of the Apostles highlights the growth of the Jesus' message and its success among the pagan churches which Paul and Barnabas have founded. They return to Antioch, from where they were expelled at the end of the reading last Sunday. The second reading comes, once again, from the book of Revelation (Apocalypse). It is another of John's vision, this time a joyful one about a new heaven and a new earth and a new Jerusalem. In this new Jerusalem, God lives among his people, 'his name is: God-with-them'. 'Now I am making the whole of creation new.' The action of God's Spirit is at work re-creating the world. This text is a good link between the first reading and the Gospel. We have seen the 'new work' in the communities drawn together by the preaching of Paul and Barnabas' - a new work begun in the 'glorification' of Jesus in his death and resurrection.

Reflection
Given during the Last Supper, these words begin what is called The Farewell Discourse in John's Gospel (13:31-17:26). They are Jesus' last words to his disciples before his death.

In the course of offering assurance and comfort, Jesus develops various themes that have been introduced earlier in his ministry, including in particular glory, mutual indwelling and love. His main point is the experience of life in God the disciples have and will continue to have. The relationship between the Father and the Son, which has been revealed in the first twelve chapters of the Gospel, Jesus now declares to be realised in the disciples.

The relationship between the Father, the Son and the Spirit are described in more detail here than anywhere else in the Bible. In these chapters, therefore, is the most profound teaching on God and discipleship in the Bible.

The first part of today's Gospel reading is a bit confusing unless we understand that 'glory' in the biblical tradition has to do with the revelation of the unseen God. So, in these lines there is a sense of mutual glorification - the Father is revealed in the Son and the Son reveals the Father in his death on the cross. The Son will reveal the love of the Father most patently when he gives up his life.

Using the intimate form of address, 'My little children,' Jesus gently begins to prepare the disciples for the difficult reality of his leaving them.

Just as Jesus has been God's love in action in the world, so now, the disciples must be. The indispensable nature of abiding in love is underlined by the use of 'commandment'. It is through their mutual love that all will recognise them as disciples of the One who loved even to laying down his life.