

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (YEAR C)

May 15, 2022

Acts 14:21–27 • Revelation 21:1–5a • John 13:31–33a, 34–35

I.

A stunning headline appeared this week:

FRAGMENT OF THE ASTEROID THAT KILLED OFF THE DINOSAURS
MAY HAVE BEEN FOUND.

The fossil was discovered in North Dakota.

It likely contains a tiny piece of the asteroid that struck earth 66 million years ago.

It's a remnant of a cataclysmic explosion that was trapped in amber
and therefore preserved.

It's a fascinating artifact because it provides a direct link to the past,
to a pivotal moment in history.

It's remarkable to think even a forceful explosion does, eventually, die down.

II.

In the spiritual life,
it can feel that an explosion of enthusiasm, fervor, and closeness to God
slows down, and even becomes inert.

That can take place in our individual lives
but also in the expanse of history,
as the Church passes through time.

Here in the United States,
the metrics of pastoral vitality have been declining for decades:

Mass attendance, reception of the Sacrament of Penance,
baptisms, confirmations, First Holy Communions, marriages,
and vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

The pandemic has accelerated this trend.

And it's doubtful the trend will be reversed anytime soon.

And that trend contrasts with the steady growth of the early Church narrated in the Acts of the Apostles, which is read throughout the Easter season.

Then there are the circumstances—the culture—in which the Church lives.

The social and political fissures in American society continue to grow.

The latest evidence of that trend is the sharp rhetoric and threats of violence emanating from the leak of the draft opinion of the Supreme Court regarding abortion.

Some Catholic churches around the country have even been the targets of such violence and vandalism.

This is the world in which we live;
we don't get to choose another one.

But this is also where we are meant to be,
where we are meant to become saints.

God commissions us to be witnesses to the Gospel right here, and right now.

“I give you a new commandment:
love one another.

This is how all will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.”

What does Jesus mean by “new”?

His commandment is **not** new in the sense that it appears in the Old Testament.

What is new are the circumstances in which Jesus gives this commandment.

Christ himself has perfectly fulfilled the commandment by his death and resurrection.

This is the meaning of the term “glorification” in that reading, which is part of Jesus’ discourse at the Last Supper, where it refers to his passion, death, and resurrection:

“Now is the Son of Man glorified,
and God is glorified in him.
If God is glorified in him,
God will also glorify him in himself,
and God will glorify him at once.”

The power to love like Jesus Christ—
to even sacrifice one’s life for others—
is channeled to us through the Holy Eucharist,
which was instituted at the Last Supper.

That explosive energy is not trapped in the Eucharist, as if it were amber.

Rather, it radiates to our lives through the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood:

“As I have loved you,
so you also should love one another.”

Christ not only gives us a command;
he beckons us to enter into communion with him,
so that we receive his power to love others.

Loving others is not just being “nice” to people.

It means standing up for what is right,
regardless of popular opinion.

That means defending unborn children from the scourge of abortion,
supporting expectant mothers,
protecting the elderly and disabled from the specter of euthanasia,
and assisting the poor who are often lost in the oblivion of homelessness.

It also means respecting all people,
regardless of how they choose to conduct their own lives,
and regardless of how they treat us.

On Friday,
Catholics in the United States were asked to fast and to pray the Rosary,
to help lessen tensions surrounding the leak of the draft Supreme Court opinion,
and to bring about an end to abortion.

As I said to those at Friday's Mass:
It's not enough to be right about an issue.

Love for others means leading them to the truth by the witness of our lives:
with courage, fortitude, perseverance, patience, understanding, and compassion.

The current social and political environment stokes fear and rage.

Jesus Christ offers a different path, a different way of life:
communion with him and with his Father.

This is a beautiful way to live!

As we hear in the Second Reading, from the Book of Revelation,
communion with God is the meaning of heaven:

“Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race.
He will dwell with them
and they will be his people
and God himself will always be with them as their God.”

This new heaven and new earth takes root now, in a fallen and broken world:

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes,
and there will be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain,
for the old order has passed away.”

This “holy city,” the “new Jerusalem,” springs from the Eucharist.

The holy sacrament changes us,
with explosive power to love others after the example of Jesus Christ.

And the Eucharist sends us forth,
carrying Christ into the world.