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To dream the impossible dream, to fight the unbeatable foe, to bear with unbearable sorrow, to run where the brave dare not go.” In “The Man of La Mancha,” Don Quixote sang those words in his imaginary role as the chivalrous hero to Dulcinea, the lady of the court he had invented for his dream quest. His idealistic song ends with the idea that if he is true to his quest, the world will be better because one man “strove with his last ounce of courage ... to reach the unreachable star.” Of course, Don Quixote was crazy.

Don Quixote is an extreme example of every person or group that dreams of making a better, if not perfect, world. A century before Miguel de Cervantes wrote about Don Quixote, St. Thomas More described a perfect society he called “Utopia,” which means no place (ou: not, topos: place). More invented Utopia as a place where all religions are acceptable, where male and female priests are elected by the people, and where no one needs private property because everyone’s needs are met. More’s Utopia was actually more a critique of British society than a serious plan for an alternative.

Western thinkers from St. Benedict to Karl Marx have used their discontents to help them envision eutopia, a word which means a beautiful (eu) place for humans to thrive. Benedict started a movement in the sixth century that continues today in the

church's multiplicity of congregations of women and men religious. Marx's ideas have been taken up by socialists and communists with widely divergent results. For the next two weeks, we will hear about St. John's eutopia as he describes it in the Book of Revelation.

John is not hoping for a back-to-nature return to the virgin simplicity of Eden. But he is trusting that God gave humanity the vocation to continue the work of creation. John's ideal is a city, the fruit of creation and the work of human hands.

In John's vision, the new heaven and earth do not appear until the former have passed away. That suggests that John is talking about something like a resurrected creation. On the model of the risen Christ, it is a product of its history and yet thoroughly transformed. This is a vision of evolution reaching its pinnacle, the realization of the full potential of every person and every part of the universe. One dimension of the beauty of this vision is its mysterious open-endedness. As the First Letter of John says, "What we shall be has not yet been revealed" (1 John 3:2). In John's vision, the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, meaning that unlike the impossible dream, it is God's creation, as real as the universe in which we now live and move.

John describes the new Jerusalem as a bride prepared to meet her husband. This is a way of saying that the new creation, unlike the first, starts with God but is not God's unilateral project. The new creation flows from the collaboration of a loving God and humanity eager to be in union with God. It is a way of being that comes about through the mutual love of God and humankind bringing everything to the realization of its greatest potential.

John runs out of words to describe the future he has glimpsed. Like the utopians, he explains elements of the future in terms of the problems that will be overcome; there will be no more weeping, death, mourning or pain. But a unique characteristic of John's new Jerusalem is that rather than have any governance or, as we shall hear next week, even a temple, life here is structured only by the fact that God dwells within creation and creation dwells in God.

John's vision is a mystery, meaning that there is always more to be discovered in it. It is neither an impossible dream nor a reality that any philosophy or form of government can construct. Nevertheless, John tells us about it so that we can try to imagine it, so that we can hope for it, so that our belief that this new Jerusalem is

our destination will provide the orientation for how we live from now on. We move toward it with every grace-touched activity that creates more love, more unity within creation, more union among human beings and between humanity and God.

John is describing God's dream for creation. He begins with what Genesis describes as our vocation and carries it through to Christ's mission to bring us into full union with God. We believe Christ has overcome the foe and wipes out sorrow. What remains for us now is to follow and to go where only Christ can lead us.

ACTS 14:21-27

Today's Lectionary selection from Acts skips over a dramatic scene that illustrates Paul's later statement that "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships." Acts 14:19-20 narrates how leaders from Antioch riled people up, dragged Paul out of the city and stoned him, then left him for dead. Luke then tells us that the disciples circled round him — whether after the fact or trying to protect him — and he rose up. The next day, Paul and Barnabas set out to preach and return to places where the leaders had rejected them.

Luke is giving us images of heroism and community strength. This reading invites us to imagine the kind of groups that had formed as people accepted the Gospel. These people, Jews and Gentiles, were now being called "Christians," a term that began as a mocking reference to the fact that they believed that Jesus was the anointed Messiah. (The word Christ has the same root as chrism.)

If at first the new converts were disillusioned by the suffering the Christian sect had to face, persecution also had the effect of strengthening them. Paul and his companions had the backing of both the Hebrew prophetic tradition and Jesus' story to help them understand that God's chosen ones must face opposition. Thus, as they had earlier rejoiced in being chosen to suffer for the sake of the Gospel (Acts 13:52), now Paul, who had been left for dead, takes it upon himself to encourage others to face anything that will come their way.

At this point, Paul goes beyond simple encouragement and "appoints" (lays hands on) some leaders who will be called elders or presbuteros. Elder/presbyter was a title in the Jewish tradition for leaders who represented the people in political or religious activities. We meet them in the Gospels as part of a council, and their role in the Christian community is described in the epistles of Timothy and Titus. The title is entirely different from the title for priest (hiereus) which denotes someone whose

work has to do with the Temple (hieron) and sacrifice. Paul's decision to appoint certain people as elders marks a stage of the slowly growing identity and organization of the community.

Taken as a whole, this selection from Acts opens a window on the evolution of the Christian community. The missionaries remained itinerant, facing whatever came their way and inspiring the stable communities to do the same. Paul and Barnabas established communities, allowed them to grow, helped to structure them, and visited them to keep them encouraged and aware of the growth of rest of the church. Throughout, Paul maintained a healthy respect for the diversity of the groups, their membership and their particular needs.

PSALM 145:8-9, 10-11, 12-13

Psalm 145 follows the pattern called acrostic; the first Hebrew word of each verse begins with the successive letters of the alphabet. The pattern itself, like the verses we will sing today, suggests God's universality; we praise God for everything, from A to Z.

The selection we pray today begins with a statement that is both a proclamation of faith and a song of praise. We begin by proclaiming God's graciousness and mercy. Graciousness is a word that the Hebrew Scriptures use only in reference to God; we can glean something of its meaning from Exodus 22:26. There, as part of giving the law, God orders that if a person has given his cloak as collateral, it must be returned at night. If not, says God, "If he cries out to me, I will listen, for I am gracious." (The NAB translates the word as compassionate in this passage.) God's graciousness thus implies that God is moved by the needs of the vulnerable.

The psalmist elaborates on that idea in the next phrases, calling God merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness or hesed. That last, lovingkindness, refers to the loving relationship God maintains with humankind, a relationship that is mutual even though unequal.

Having described God's goodness, we move into a call to praise. If there is a particular word that dominates this psalm, it is "all." God is compassionate to all; all God's works are called to praise; God's kingdom is for all ages and all generations. Thus, it is not only fitting that we sing, "I will praise your name for ever," but we should also understand that our praise implies our responsibility to live in a way that gives witness to the character of the God whom we worship.

REVELATION 21:1-5a

We might see this as a description of John's utopia — except that utopia means no place and John's vision clearly describes a real place: the transformed Jerusalem at the center of the new creation. Some scholars make the intriguing suggestion that this holy city is not so much a dwelling place for the saints as it is the atmosphere created by the relationships among the saints with one another and with God. Scripture scholar Grant Osborne, in the book *Revelation*, cites various authors who say that John is describing the future state of the saints, not their home. That idea suggests that these verses describe theosis, the divinization of humanity brought into union with God.

Whether John wants to denote a place or a way of being together, he is describing the ultimate destiny of creation in union with God. Whereas the apocalyptic elements of the Book of Revelation — dragons, beasts and the like — may seem the stuff of fantasy fiction, John's description of the new Jerusalem invites us into realistic and hopeful contemplation.

John says that the new Jerusalem comes down, meaning that its origin is in God. Saying that it is like a bride prepared for her husband emphasizes the mutuality of the relationship between God and the people. God awaits the people's response just as people in love wait for one another's response because only thus can they grow in genuine union.

God's union with humanity in this new reality is neither guardianship nor companionship but an indwelling. This is the fulfillment of creation and specifically of Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper: "I pray ... that they may all be one ... that they also may be in us" (John 17:20-21). The new Jerusalem symbolizes the transformation of all creation, what Teilhard de Chardin called the Omega Point, an existence in which God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

As we near the end of the Easter season, John's vision of the new Jerusalem as our future in God deserves profound attention. As we contemplate this as the future God holds out to us, we will begin to understand how to so desire it that we will be open to the grace to live into it.

JOHN 13:31-33a, 34-35

Today's Gospel returns us to the table of the Last Supper where Jesus' primary sign of self-giving was the washing of his disciples' feet. John makes the point that Jesus washed everyone's feet (even the women's) and adds that Judas had received food from Jesus' own hand. Our selection begins at night, just after Judas left the group.

When we understand this shared meal as a communion, we realize that Jesus gave himself to Judas just when Judas was preparing to abandon and betray the group. Once Judas left, Jesus announced that his glorification had begun. We should note, this is not simply Jesus' glorification, but God's glorification in him. Jesus was revealing God's glory as well as participating in it.

From the beginning of this supper, John has shown Jesus' glory by portraying him as the servant, the least among them all. In the last scene with Judas, Jesus offered himself fully to the traitor. This is a symbolic anticipation of everything that is to come in the Passion; it reveals the glory of God who is all love and forgiveness, whose faithfulness to frail and sinful human beings cannot be overcome, not even by betrayal on the part of Jesus' closest friends or the chosen people. God's glory is the act of loving that nothing can diminish.

Surely, the disciples didn't comprehend what Jesus was teaching them. They had to pass through the tragic scandal of the cross and know the joy of the Resurrection to begin to understand his message. But with his next words, Jesus summarized it in a way that they could begin to grasp.

Deepening their awareness that he was pronouncing his last testament, Jesus told them he would be with them only a little longer. Then, he put into words what he had already taught them through the symbolic actions of washing their feet and sharing their food: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." He didn't simply ask them to love one another; he set himself up as the model for what love means. As he had said at the supper, they were to wash each other's feet. As he had shown them on the mountain near the Sea of Galilee, they were to share their bread with the hungry and gather up the fragments so that nothing would ever be wasted.

This was truly a new commandment. In fact, some might call it blasphemous — as if human beings might be capable of expressing divine love. But we can't get around the fact that Jesus said it: "Love one another as I have loved you." Now, their measure of love was not to be determined by their feelings, their blood or cultural

ties, but by the love of God the Creator who recognizes no divisive or categorizing distinctions among human creatures.

The subtle pretext in Jesus' command comes in the second clause, "as I have loved you." Jesus said this to the disciples whose feet he had just washed. Before they could love as he did, they had to comprehend how greatly they were loved. Fulfilling Jesus' command to love is not a task that can be accomplished, it is a response to receiving love. Jesus was telling his table companions that their communion with him and one another would empower their loving. It would reveal the glory of God just as Jesus would reveal it by being lifted up. Their self-giving service would be the sacrament that would make them a sign and source of salvation for the world.

This is where the message of our selection from Revelation illuminates today's Gospel. Jesus proclaimed that God's glory is revealed in self-emptying love. He told us, his disciples, that as we receive that love by allowing him to feed us and wash our feet, we will become capable of loving as he did. That will transform us so that we can incarnate the new Jerusalem in the way we love one another, and through loving one another, love our God.

Planning: Fifth Sunday of Easter

By Lawrence Mick

The One who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' " That's the end of our second reading today. It leads me to wonder what it means to make something "new." The wording might give us a hint. It does not say "make all new things" but "make all things new."

That suggests that things are being remade or renewed rather than destroyed or discarded. So when this same reading begins with John's vision of "saw a new heaven and a new earth," that doesn't really mean that God is going to destroy the Earth and create a new one from scratch. Rather, this current Earth is meant to be renewed.

This is an important distinction because some Christians justify the plundering of the Earth and its destruction because God will soon destroy it anyway. Pope Francis offers a very different view in "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home": "In the

Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: 'All things have been created through him and for him' (Col :16). The prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) reveals Christ's creative work as the Divine Word (Logos). But then, unexpectedly, the prologue goes on to say that this same Word 'became flesh' (Jn 1:14). One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole ..." (#99).

And what makes things new? The Gospel reminds us: "I give you a new commandment: love one another." Love is the power that created the universe, and love is the power that can recreate it. This is not some Pollyanna-view of life. Our first reading reminds us that love is not easy: "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." That is why evil continues to roil our world. Love is often hard and even painful, as the cross constantly reminds us. Love often costs us, because giving ourselves to others requires surrender of our selfishness and pride. Loving others can also bring suffering when it requires confronting explicitly or implicitly the powers that oppress them.

Can you find ways to weave the theme of newness, especially the new commandment to love one another, into the liturgy today? Are there Easter songs that highlight newness and re-creation? Can you craft petitions that pray for the renewal of the Earth and its people? Notice that today's first two readings repeat, in different ways, last week's theme of the universality of the good news and thus of the command to love.

Prayers: Fifth Sunday of Easter

By Joan DeMerchant_

Introduction

We live in a caustic environment, where kindness, love or renewal are often mocked as soft or unrealistic. It can be legitimately discouraging. But the word from the beginning was that it would not be easy, and the pathway would be through pain. Nothing is achieved without imagination, and today's readings provide a vision for those of us willing to continue the quest for something new. Like the early

Christians, we can help to create a renewed earth.

Penitential Act

- Lord Jesus, you spoke of deep, loving union with the God you called Father: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you gave us the new commandment to love one another: Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, you have equipped us with a powerful vision for the world: Lord, have mercy.

Prayer of the Faithful

Presider Let us pray now for the needs of the world and for the work to which we are called.

Minister For the pope and all the church's leaders, that their vision, words and actions may witness to a deep love for the whole human race and the Earth itself, we pray:

- For an awareness of our call to bring vision to life in our corner of the Earth, through our often-meager attempts and floundering commitment, we pray:
- For those who are graduating full of hope for the possibility of contributing to a better world, and for work that fulfills their dreams, we pray:
- For those with visions based on racism, greed or protecting the status quo, that their hearts and minds open to something larger and more beautiful, we pray:
- For those too sick, too worried or in too much pain to attend to a larger vision of life; and for the compassion to understand them and serve their needs, we pray:

Presider God who makes all things new, empower us. We pray that we may dream of a new Earth in which your love permeates everyone and everything. Give us the courage to resist our reticence, take risks and deal with barriers and setbacks, as Jesus' early followers did in building the church. We ask this in the name of the One who glorified you. Amen.

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