

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Easter Year “C”

May 14-15, 2022

Readings: Acts 14: 21-27; Rev. 21:1-5; John 13: 31-35

In today’s readings, we are introduced to a vision in which “the old order has passed away” and a “new heaven and a new earth” emerges. One of the great challenges amid the many forces competing for our attention is to be able to see beyond what meets the eye, towards that which is eternal. How do we accomplish this? As a “rookie” teacher more than 30 years ago, I tried to help my students visualize beyond this world. I asked my seniors a hypothetical question: “If you knew that you had just 10 minutes left to live on this earth, how would you spend that time?”

Students responded, “I’d go to confession!” or “I’d spend time with my family and friends,” while a third quipped, “I’d go skydiving without a parachute....” But one said, “Father, if I only had 10 minutes left on earth I’d spend it right here in this class period” The students all rolled their eyes! I was suspicious, so I asked, “Why would you choose that?” I walked right into his trap: “Because Father, when I’m in your class, 10 minutes seems like an eternity!” I learned my lesson as a rookie teacher!

Many aspects of daily life can “seem like an eternity.” We wait in line endlessly at grocery stores, lunch lines, even waiting for a green light on John Ireland Blvd. Today’s scriptures invite us to gain perspective by realizing that this present age is passing away. In God’s eyes, preparations are already underway for something beyond what we see on earth.

The Book of Revelation’s description of God’s eternal kingdom in heaven employs imagery and opaque symbolism, only adding to the challenges of interpreting it. Despite the many challenges on earth, we are not eager to depart. We are so tied to this life, dreaming that heaven will be like our favorite things on earth. Today’s reading stands as a stark reminder that God’s ways are not ours. I will be the first to admit that this book is obscure. Many have gone too far in their interpretation, even predicting the end of the world on a specific date. They’ve all been wrong.

God's plan for creation continues to march forward, whether we abide by its principles or heed his warnings. We mustn't forget that for God a day is like 1000 years, as Saint Peter wrote in his epistle. While it is fruitless to speculate as to when or how this will be accomplished, the renewal will be "the definitive realization of God's plan to bring under a single head 'all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth.'"<sup>1</sup>

John presents a vision, encompassing heaven and the Church, coming down from heaven as the new Jerusalem, the temple of the living God. It is unimaginably beautiful in its inner nature. The Son of God, head and bridegroom, always remains with his Church. The New Jerusalem exists both in heaven and on earth through the communion of saints. But the church only receives its perfection in the glory of heaven.<sup>2</sup>

With such dignity given to us as members of Christ's church, we strive always to live up to these privileges, to make this vision a reality. This then is where we should carefully heed the words of our first reading from the acts of the apostles. Recall, Saint Paul reminded the disciples that "we must undergo many trials if we are to enter the reign of God."

But why must it be so? Shouldn't it be otherwise? Our faith is meant to comfort us, yet we are told that we will have to undergo many trials to enter the reign of God. It is not fanciful to desire suffering, to willfully accept a trial in life. But the mere fact that so many have persevered in their faith throughout trial is perhaps our very best evidence that there is value to it. St. John Paul II spoke often of "redemptive suffering."

Take a moment to recall some accomplishment in your life of which you are proud. Now ask yourself the follow-up question whether it was easy. I suspect the answer was no. The greatest achievements in life are precisely so valued in large part because of the effort needed to accomplish them.

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<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1043.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, para # 1042, quoting Vatican II *Lumen Gentium*, # 48.

Surveying the societal landscape, tremendous challenges emerge before us in the weeks and months ahead. Unquestionably, people are on edge due to economic uncertainties and rising costs, security concerns, both in our neighborhoods and nationally. The looming Supreme Court decision about which I wrote in this week's bulletin is arguably the most significant decision in decades. The right to life precedes all others and provides the foundation for every other right that we possess as human beings.

These must be seen for what they are— these are trials. And however small or severe, such trials prepare us to configure ourselves more closely with Christ, thereby preparing the way for the new heavens and the new earth to become reality. Do not run away from the trials; engage them with faith, hope and trust. Lean into them with confidence in God.

We have two choices today. We can see the Book of Revelation as “pie in the sky dreaming,” a wonderful image, but little more. Or we can remain diligent and work and pray to see this dream become a reality.

God is not a liar! This vision will come to fruition. The only remaining question it seems, is “What will we do to help bring about that vision?”