

5th Sunday of Easter (Year C) 15th May 2022
2nd Reading: Rev 21:1-5
Gospel: John 13:31-35

Out of Darkness – Something New

Today's gospel begins with an apparently simple line: 'When Judas had gone...' To understand fully the impact of that line we must look back to the previous verse.

Into the night

As Judas leaves the Last Supper table to go and betray Jesus, John inserts a cinematic detail: 'Night had fallen'. This is more than just a reminder that the evening has drawn on. Light and dark are essential themes in John's gospel. So this is a *spiritual* night. The story is entering the dark night as the forces of betrayal will begin to draw close around Jesus and his disciples.

A night of teaching

But it is this night, this dark night, which John uses as the setting for Jesus' most precious, most intimate, most personal teaching. Sometimes called the 'farewell discourse', for more than four chapters it pours forth from Jesus:

- There are many rooms in my Father's house.
- I am the vine and you are the branches.
- A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends.
- May they all be one.

All these, and many other, familiar and well-loved lines come to us out of this dark night. Let's just hold that for a moment...these iconic and essential teachings of Jesus we know and love so well come out of this darkest night.... And it begins with what we have just heard, the new commandment to love one another.

Real love

Jesus teaches us that our love must be visible: 'By this love...everyone will know that you are my disciples'. Our love therefore must be manifest in real actions. The world will see who and what we love by observing how we spend our time and resources. Fine words and thoughts count for little.

Darkness of persecution

God bringing something new out of darkness is something that we also see in the reading from Revelation (or Apocalypse). The book is written for the early Christian Church facing brutal persecutions, to instil courage, and faithfulness to Christ amongst the people who might be in danger of falling away. Yet out of the darkness of that persecution comes this vision of a new heaven and a new earth, and a new Jerusalem, the Holy City where all tears will be wiped away.

Human creativity

The idea that new things may come forth out of difficulty is well known. Necessity is the mother of invention, and we sometimes only know our true potential in adversity. And that is true as individuals, as a community, and as a world. The global issues of war, especially in Ukraine, the COVID pandemic and of climate change continue to call forth new creativity. And the quality of our discipleship of Jesus will be revealed

in the quality of our love: our love revealed in real actions to care for those both near and far away, and for those yet to exist in generations to come.

Divine creativity

But I want to be clear that this is more than just a humanist affirmation that we only know our true potential in adversity and that necessity is the mother of invention - although that is part of it. The bigger picture is that God's grace abounds in our weakness.

Resurrection here and now

Resurrection, then, is not something remote and distant that we just wait for. We should look for it in the dark times of our lives. Remember that in John's gospel Jesus reigns triumphant long before Easter Sunday. As Judas leaves Jesus declares 'Now has the Son of Man been glorified'. And his last word from the cross 'It is accomplished' is a shout of victory.

Do not flee the night

Easter does not promise us a quick exit from our darkness and difficulties. Neither is it an anaesthetic to take our pain away. We cannot bypass Good Friday. We affirm glory to come, but not in a way that denies glory in the present. So let's not flee from the pain and darkness in our lives, rather turn and face it. For it is there that we may sit with Jesus, break bread with him, receive his most intimate and profound teaching, and know his glory.