

First Reading: Acts 14:21-27

Second Reading: Revelations 21:1-5a

Gospel: John 13:31-33a, 34-25

Usually when I say yes to sharing my Reflection I look first at the dates I am available and only later do look at the Readings themselves. And the Spirit seems to point out where I am to go with all of them. But as I began to actually prepare for today, I had my doubts.

The Gospel again this week is very short, and we hear Jesus saying: “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.” When I first read it, I wondered what in the world am I supposed to do with this.

Today we are here together in a time of God’s glory. On the cross Jesus showed us glory – Not in coming down from the cross in a magnificent news-making spectacle – but rather, in a spectacular act of heart, of immense love as he forgives those who are killing him. Divine Glory is manifested in his forgiveness of the actions of others toward him, toward those who killed him.

This is the real glory! The compassion and forgiveness that Jesus manifested in the face of hatred, jealousy and murder.

And the Gospel continues: “...love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.” We see this in many different faces today. We see it in the faces of those who stayed behind in the Ukraine to serve their country, their brothers and sisters. I see in the face of Fr. Pavlo Vyshkovskyi OMI and others who have remained in Kyiv to serve those who could not leave. We see it in the faces of so many of the First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples who are inviting us to walk with them, to be in community with them. It is not about fixing something, assigning blame or having to be better than the other. “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.” Compassion and forgiveness.

But I ask myself softly – what does this look like in my own very small and ordinary life? Am I capable of loving those people who have hurt me, who really hurt me? Am I capable of forgiving them?

A little story. There once was this man, a priest who would shout down to us little children about how bad we were and how much we hurt God. And he would stare at each one of us in turn and ask us “how can God love you when you are so bad?” I can remember sitting there crying. Later as a teenager I left the Church because God would surely never love someone like me. I was already deep into drugs and alcohol and my life steadily got darker and more hopeless. I remember hearing somewhere along the way that my first communion priest became a bishop and idly wondered how they could promote a man like that.

Years later when I returned to the Church, I was asked to give a talk to a group of seminarians – I know!!! Imagine – me going to a seminary to talk to future priests about welcoming single lay people back into the Church. Just as I began to speak the Archbishop walked in and sat down in the front row, right in front of me. And he did not look happy. At the end of my talk he stood up and said how sad he was that I had shamed my church and my family – drugs, alcohol and other things. I, who had been sent to a Catholic School. He suggested I leave. I was filled with rage and became very bold, telling him that I had been invited and perhaps he wanted to leave. And he did – or he at least left that room.

I carried that anger, fear and hatred for another 40 years.

It was only during this past Lent when I started to tell someone about him that I realised what I was carrying around inside of me – it was only harming me because he was long dead. I told God I needed to let him go and asked God to help me. This past week I was looking online at some pictures of some Oblates

out west, many of them now dead, but it was a gift to be able to see their faces again. And then oops there HE was in a picture with some of them. Curiously I did not quickly shut down my computer and try to bring up my memories of how horrible he was. Instead I simply looked at him calmly noticed he was smiling in the picture and I told him that he looked happy and then I moved on to the next screen of photos. And I smiled. I was finally free of that fear and hurt ruling my life. Compassion and forgiveness.

Pope Francis tells us that “Love opens up toward the other, becoming the foundation of human relationships.”

In Acts we heard about how the door to faith was opened to the Gentiles. To all of us. And - it was in Revelations that we heard: “See, I make all things new”.

Compassion and forgiveness – truly, we are all made new.