

## ***Fifth Sunday of Easter***

### **First reading:**

*The End of Paul's First Missionary Journey  
(Acts 14.21-27)*

Antioch was a big city, one of the largest in the ancient world. On the Mediterranean coast of Syria, it was at the end of the trade route from the east. So it had a busy commercial life, and there was a large colony of Jews among the traders. A considerable group of them accepted Jesus as Messiah and Lord, and it was at Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called 'Christians' or 'Messianists'.

Other Jews thought the Messiah had not yet come. The community there had appointed the well-trained and eloquent Paul to accompany Barnabas (Barnabas was still the leader) in spreading the Good News about Jesus as the Messiah. At the end of their journey, they reported back to the community at Antioch.

It is significant that Barnabas and Paul appointed elders in each community. This was the normal constitution of a Jewish community. A synagogue is still ruled by a body of elders, of whom one is chosen to preside. Obviously, in spite of the upset of which we read last Sunday, these Christian communities felt themselves to be like the other Jewish communities, although accepting Jesus as Messiah, and living by his Spirit.

### **Question:**

*To what extent should my behaviour as a Christian be different from that of others? Is it my business to attempt to change them?*

### **Second reading:**

*The New Jerusalem  
(Revelation 21.1-5))*

Like so much of the Book of Revelation, this prophecy of the New Jerusalem is heavily dependent on the prophets of the Old Testament.

In the dark days of the Babylonian Exile the prophet Ezekiel had foretold that God would rebuild Jerusalem as a new city where God would dwell, a city named Hephzibah, 'My pleasure is in her'. The prophets had long spoken of the relationship of Israel to God as that of a bride to her husband, a bride who was often unfaithful. Then Isaiah had foretold a joyful marriage feast in which God would be the bridegroom and Jerusalem the bride, the final wedding of God to his people. God's bride, Israel, who had so often been unfaithful, would at last be wedded to him forever in fidelity and happiness.

This was the intended meaning of the marriage feast at Cana and of the parables of Jesus about a wedding feast of the great king, to which the poor and the outcasts would be invited. Here the Book of Revelation promises just such a festival to those who have sustained the grimness of Roman persecution. Now, as we celebrate Christ's triumph over death, we look forward to this same unalloyed happiness of God's presence and his love.

### **Question:**

*If God lives among us now, where and how can I most find him?*

From now on till Pentecost we read in John the great final teaching of Jesus at the Last Supper about the future of his Church and his disciples. From the sayings of Jesus, the evangelist has composed a great discourse of Jesus about the obligations, duties and dangers that will come on his disciples after his own death and Resurrection. There were probably slightly different versions of this discourse, which were handed down by word of mouth; the slight impression of repetition results from the evangelist putting three versions one after another.

As we approach the Birth of the Church at Pentecost we need to listen to how Jesus envisaged his community. This reading gives the essentials. At the head of the Christian community stands the glorified Son of Man, in whom God himself is glorified. But this is no distant figurehead, for he will come to be present among his disciples. And how? In the love his disciples show for one another.

One is reminded of the legend about the aged St John, wheeled into the church at Ephesus. When asked for the message of Jesus, all he would say was, 'My little children, love one another.'

**Question:**

*What in practice does this love mean for you?*

*Does it really make sense to say, 'I love him with a Christian love, but I just don't like him'?*

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