

## Fifth Sunday of Easter

There is a story of an older couple who had a rebellious son. He would often stumble in from a night of revelry and drunkenness and passed out on his bed late at night. The father noticed that the mother would always get up shortly after their son had come home. Inquisitively, he got up one night to see what she was doing. He found her in their son's bedroom kneeling by his side and caressing him and stroking his face gently and kissing his hand and covering him up with a blanket. He asked her, "What are you doing here? Do you do this every day?" The mother replied, "Yes. I do this every day. I must show my love to him when he is asleep, because he will not allow me to do so when he is awake."

This story of a mother comforting her son, even when he is resistant to that care while awake, is an image that we need to keep before us as we reflect on the Scriptures given to us this weekend. When a loved one passes away, we may find it a difficult time. We experience so many strong emotions that conflict us that we may need to be reminded of who God is for us. To that end we go to the gospel today. Our God is the one who lovingly strokes us while we sleep, while we cannot, through our human frailty and sinfulness, know his love for us. Our God is the one who tells us in the gospel today that there awaits each of each beloved children a place of rest and peace, a room for especially prepared for us. This speaks to us of how cherished and loved we are by our God. This speaks of God's desire for us that we should be saved and not lost eternally. There is always hope even in the darkest of circumstances. I often suggest to people at funerals when we hear the first part of today's gospel that we can use our imagination to know what would be in the room of our deceased loved one. Our God is the one who brings consolation and peace in time of distress. This is the Paschal mystery.

Our relationship with God is defined in another way in the second reading.

*"You are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises" of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light".*

It is essential to note that we are called into a relationship for a purpose. We are to praise God who has saved us from sin and death. This is what we celebrated at the Easter Triduum and throughout this Easter season.

Finally we come to our first reading. We hear a specific way that the early church praised God. There were widows who were not included in the daily distribution of food. A ministry was created to ensure that this situation was corrected. For us this is a reminder that it is not enough to know we are God's beloved. It is not enough to just pray. We must fulfill the two commandments of Jesus to love God and our neighbour as ourselves. Our love of neighbour must be rooted in our love of God.

So today our gospel shares that we are cherished children of God, our second reading that we are " God's chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people set apart," and the first reading that we

must care for one another, especially those most in need. So at the end of mass when we are dismissed to love and serve the Lord, let us take the teaching and challenge of today's readings to heart in our daily living.

If I were to choose one virtue to embrace each day I would select kindness. With that I will conclude with this story. There is a story told about the surrender of the Confederacy at Appomattox Courthouse as the Civil War concluded. General Grant was an unusual man. Knowing the war was over and the victory was his, he showed great, and unusual, kindness and respect toward the chief general of the Confederates. He allowed General Robert E. Lee to ride freely in and out of the area. He also allowed the Confederate men to keep their possessions and horses. Grant gave them food because they were hungry and let them all go home undisturbed.

Lee was permanently touched by Grant's kindness. After the war, Lee became the president of Washington College in Virginia. On one occasion, one of his fellow instructors, also a Southerner, began to speak poorly of Grant to Lee (assuming he'd receive a sympathetic audience). Lee turned, looked the man straight in the eye, and said, "Sir, if you ever again presume to speak disrespectfully of General Grant in my presence, either you or I will sever his connection with this university." Because General Lee had received such kindness from Grant, he treasured and protected the good name of the one who had showed him such kindness.

So should we give and receive kindness as disciples of Jesus.