

**Fifth Sunday of Easter – May 15th 2022**  
**A Reflection by Fr Sylvester O’Flynn OFM Cap., Rochestown, Cork**

**God makes all things new**

Where is the risen Lord to be met? The liturgy each Sunday in this Easter season directs our thoughts to the various situations where the Lord is present and active in our midst. Over the weeks we have reflected on his presence in the mission of forgiveness, in the faith of those who do not see yet believe, in the breaking of bread and in the call of the Good Shepherd to his flock. The message of today is the presence of the Lord in the Church as a community of people inspired by the new way of love revealed in the example of Christ.

**I am making the whole of creation new**

It rarely happens that all three Sunday Mass Readings touch on the same theme. This Sunday however has the theme of newness in all three Readings. As Nature in May has totally recovered after the sleep of winter, we celebrate the newness of life in the liturgy of Easter and Pentecost. Creation is not an event finished in the past but is new every day, evolving and changing, dying and rising.

**Fresh hearts for a suffering people**

Today’s First Reading is taken from the Acts of the Apostles. The preaching of Paul and Barnabas put fresh heart into people, encouraging them to persevere in faith. Faith gives a new, refreshing way at looking at the hardships of life. The eyes of faith keep mind and spirit ever young. Some of the youngest people I have met are well advanced in years but very young in spirit. Boredom and staleness are not part of their vocabulary.

The Second Reading today is from the Apocalypse, a highly imaginative but difficult book, written to sustain hope for Christians who were suffering violent persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire. After all sorts of monsters, calamity and terror, the visionary finally sees a New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, as beautiful as a bride all dressed for her husband. God will make his home among them: his name is God-with-them. God spoke: “Now I am making the whole of creation new.”

One is reminded of the exciting words of Patrick Kavanagh in his poem, *Advent*.

*“And the newness of every stale thing  
When we looked at it as children”*

Remember how Jesus told us that unless we become like little children, we will not enter into the sort of kingdom that he came to establish. Faith retains the child’s sense of wonder which goes beyond human science. The Psalms encourage us to sing a new song unto the Lord.

**I give you a new commandment.**

This leads us to the Gospel of the day, taken from the parting words of Jesus to the apostles at the last supper. Judas had just left them. The evangelist tells us that night had fallen. This indicates that the Passion of Jesus was about to begin. However, the death of Jesus would not be a tragedy but would open the door to glory. There would have been no resurrection if there had been no death. And the resurrection opened the closed doors when the Risen Lord told the confused disciples, “As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.”

The New Jerusalem is inspired by the standard set by Jesus: “I give you a new commandment: love one another, just as I have loved you, you also must love one another.” Even some pagan philosophers in Rome admired how these Christians loved one another.

The commandment of love was not entirely new as it was there for hundreds of years in the Jewish writings. However, the teaching of Jesus was new in two ways: in the standard of love that he set; and in the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus set an example of love that has no limitations, extends to enemies, totally forgiving, refusing to be poisoned by the wrongs done by others, generous in sharing and caring, and is self-sacrificing. These ideals are beyond natural instinct but become possible by the supernatural grace of the Holy Spirit. “By this love that you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

### **Walking with Christ and the Holy Spirit**

Pope Francis has invited us to take a walk with the Risen Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That is what the Synod means. We are asked to ponder and pray as individuals, to avail of discussions with other people, perhaps to respond to a questionnaire. What is the future of the Church? What does it mean to you? Are you hurt? Disappointed? Do you see glimpses of hope? Do you wish to let everything stay the same? Or are you hoping for changes.

Let us draw hope and strength from the Mass Readings of this Sunday. Paul and Barnabas put fresh heart into people, encouraging them to persevere in the faith.

The visionary who wrote the Book of Revelation saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven. In this mystical city God sets up home and is known as God-is-with-them. “Now I am making the whole of creation new”.

The Gospel is a reminder that the supernatural grace of the Holy Spirit can transform people into Spirit-filled missionaries inspiring people into a kingdom of love, truth, justice and peace.

The greatest proof of the Resurrection is not the fact that the tomb of Jesus was empty but the transformation of the Christian community into a new way of thinking, acting, forgiving, sharing, caring, making peace and praying. No room here for mediocrity or minimalism. “By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

### **Prayer**

O God, you can make all things new. The prophet Ezekiel promised that you would remove our hearts of stone and put a new spirit within us.

As we look forward to Pentecost, we pray that you will remove the hardness of heart which refuses to forgive: the mediocrity which settles for the bare minimum: and the selfishness which fails to care and share.

Send forth your Spirit to renew the face of the earth. Enkindle within us the fire of your love.