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As we've been reading this Gospel of John the last couple of Sundays, we've been listening to the final conversation of Jesus with his disciples at the Last Supper. A week or so ago in the Gospel, he was urging them and urging us, "My one command: Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love than this no one has than to lay down your life for a friend." A week or two ago I remember talking about some people who recently, in heroic ways, have laid down their lives for others. But it isn't going to be that dramatic for most of us.

If we listen to today's Gospel, we find something about the love of Jesus that I think is quite extraordinary and yet something that we really can try to imitate. Think about what Jesus is saying at the Last Supper in today's Gospel when he's in the midst of turmoil himself. He knows what's going to happen to him when he leaves that upper room and goes into the garden to pray. He knows his life is going to be taken from him after being tortured; he'll be murdered. Surely that must be weighing on him.

Sixth Sunday of Easter

[May 26, 2019](#)

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29

Psalm 67:2-3,5,6,8

Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23

John 14:23-29

As we know, in fact, when he leaves the upper room, he goes to the garden to pray and is overcome with profound sorrow and intense awareness of what's going to happen to him. But in the midst of that, Jesus isn't thinking about himself. He's thinking about his community gathered there with him, and he's trying to reassure them because he knows they're going to have very great difficulty trying to cope with all that happens now very soon. He thinks about them even in the midst of all of his own burdens.

He urges them not to be afraid because he says, "God, after I'm gone, will send a new advocate, someone to be with you, to strengthen you, to guide you, to help you cope with all that you have to face. That advocate will be able to give you the strength you need." So Jesus is trying to show us how much he loves us by being concerned about us and looking to our future and trying to reassure us. Then he ends these remarks that he's making and he gives them the greatest possible gift: Peace. "Peace be with you."

He's trying to get them to realize that in the worst circumstances, with God as our advocate, we can still find peace deep in our hearts and our human spirit. So I hope as we reflect on this Gospel, we realize Jesus is speaking to me, each one of us, "Do not be afraid. Have courage; be confident. I am with you through the advocate, the Spirit." That was something that was very important for the early church — to know that Jesus was guiding them.

As we learned in the first lesson today from the Acts of the Apostles, the passage that we heard leaves out a good part of what happened during what we call the "Council of Jerusalem." There really was a chance that at the very beginning, the church was going to be torn apart because as we've heard from the previous passages we've listened to from the Acts, Barnabas and Paul have gone out on a missionary journey. They're doing what Jesus said, "As God sends me, I send you." They're preaching the good news, they're bringing people into the church, communities are growing throughout Asia Minor. But some people object because they're not following the Jewish traditions.

As the church in Jerusalem under the Apostle James as its leader, all of them convert to Judaism if they come from outside and then are baptized and become Christians. They were determined that that's what had to be for everybody. And Paul and Barnabas, who weren't the disciples of Jesus traveling with him during his life, they were changing all of this because God was guiding them. But they came back to Jerusalem and as you notice, or perhaps you will notice, Peter and the other apostles, as Luke tells us, call the church together.

It's just not a few who are going to settle this dispute. The whole community comes together led by Peter, Paul, Barnabas, James — the leaders — but all of the church is there. Twice in the passage St. Luke tells us it's the gathering of the whole church. That's a point that we might not notice at first when we read about this. It wasn't just the leaders, as in our church today we would think of as the bishops. No, when

they faced a profound crisis, they brought all the people of God to consult, to discuss, to try to find solutions. And they did; they brought peace to the church.

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And as I reflect on that in our current circumstances where our church is undergoing an extraordinary crisis, one that is overwhelming almost, it almost seems like we can't get beyond it — that sex abuse crisis — headlines in the paper this morning, on the news, on the radio and television last night. It's going to go on because we really haven't got down to the root causes yet. Do you know what I think is part of the problem? Maybe you would agree. When the pope, a couple of months ago now, called that important meeting in Rome, it was only bishops who were there.

What if he had parents, men and women, members of families, survivors to be part of the discussion? It seems to me clearly that the outcome would have been different. We would have begun to take definite steps to radically change our church so that we would not ordain people who are going to abuse children. We haven't taken the necessary steps yet. I'm sure most of us say, "What could I do?" The Catholic bishops of the United States will be meeting in Baltimore in a couple of weeks for their spring meeting.

Write a letter to the president of the conference, Cardinal DiNardo, and suggest that maybe as they're trying to (they'll be discussing this) come to some conclusion that will show us the way out of our crisis, invite parents, invite survivors to be part of the discussion. Make it a representation of the whole church like the disciples did in the beginning when they faced a crisis that would have destroyed the church if they had not resolved it. But also continue to pray, pray for Pope Francis. He constantly asks people, "Pray for me. Pray for me."

And I think most of say, "Why would we have to pray for him? He's the pope; he must be holy." And he is, but he still knows he needs prayer, so we do have to pray for him. Pray for the bishops that they lead us in a way, with the help of all of us, to resolve this crisis before our church is destroyed. It's Easter season, and so we celebrate death being destroyed, new life coming in Jesus. That's what gives us hope — the Resurrection. If Jesus can overcome death, rise to new life, and promise the same gift for each one of us, Jesus can also help us to bring a good resolution to the crisis we face in our times.

We can, if like those first disciples, that first community of the church, if we all work together and pray together, we can resolve our crisis, heal our church, and be the community of disciples that will take the Gospel message, "As God has sent me, I send you," and bring that message into our world with the fervor and the strength and the determination that we need to do it, so that we can not only heal the crisis but continue to spread the message of God's good news. God loves us and that's the message that we must proclaim.

Editor's note: *This homily was given May 26 at St. Ambrose Parish, Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.*