Spirituality
Scripture for Life
Columns
Spirituality



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One of my dearest friends, a retired teacher of German descent, tutors children at an urban school. Once, while working on reading with an 8-year-old African American child, they shared a book about sports. When a hard word came up, Peggy would whisper conspiratorially, "Let's cheat" and they would look it up on her phone. At the end of the semester, the kids wrote thank-you notes to their tutors. This child's card began ordinarily enough, but at the end he said, "You and I have a lot in common!" He sees things more like Jesus than most of society. Peggy said she'll never throw that paper away.

Today, our selection from Revelation offers us a vision of the new heaven and earth being born among us. This new state of affairs blurs the boundaries between heaven and earth. Its atmosphere is permeated by peoples' awareness that they live in the loving presence of God. This awareness creates an environment in which there are no more tears, mourning or pain. Nothing like that can coexist where people enjoy such a vivid awareness of God's love for and in them.

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 18, 2025

Acts 14:21-27
Psalm 145
Revelation 21:1-5a
John 13:31-33a, 34-35

In our Gospel, we hear Jesus give his disciples the most astounding commandment possible. It is one thing to say, "Love one another" — and that is intensified in his command to love our enemies. But here, he takes it to the extreme: "Love one another as I have loved you. … This is how all will know that you are my disciples."

Whoa! That definitely belongs to the new heaven and earth. It seems even truer when we remember that Jesus said this on the eve of his passion, when he announced that he was giving his life for his friends. He leaves us no wiggle room.

Before we think about loving like Jesus, we need to contemplate God's love for us. What might it feel like to hear Jesus talk about his love for you? This is not a matter

of looking at the crucifix and feeling sorry or guilty or grateful. This is a question of direct contact, of communicating heart-to-heart, of getting inside one another and understanding one another from the inside out. It's this love, like Jesus' experience of the Father, that teaches us how to love like he does.

Peggy's young friend sensed that they had understood each other. He felt in union with her. He couldn't have said what he did had he not felt love — and loved. Conspiracy is a good word for what happened between them: It means being one in spirit or soul. It happens all the time when we love someone, and has nothing to do with age or looks or gender. It's a sharing of hearts; and it changes us forever.

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That's what Jesus is asking of and offering to all of us. He was in love with his Father and with people. He knew that we all have a permeable spirit, if only we will allow others in. When it happens, we are living in the borderless new heaven and earth. There is nothing else like it.

The author of Revelation promises that, as the newness grows among us, we will know Emmanuel, God with us. We'll experience moving through and with and in Christ. As people sharing divine life, we will wipe one another's tears and redefine death. We will cherish each one's spirit, and our only mourning will be for those who rebuff the love that enlivens those who belong to God.

Of course, this is all grace. We cannot control it, we can only let it happen through and among us. Our close relationships are sacraments of this new way of living, revealing the possibilities of the human spirit. That's what Paul, Barnabas, Mary of Magdala and all evangelizers try to make present. We don't have to bring others into our way of worshipping or our theology, we simply need to allow ourselves to be caught up in the wonder of one another as God's own.

This is how Jesus loved. He didn't care about what others had accomplished, what they looked like, or anything of the kind. He saw people yearning for union with others, even when they didn't recognize it themselves. He knew that we are made to live in God and one another. As St. Augustine taught, our hearts are restless until we come home to God, and there's no way to do that except as a community in spirit.

Revelation promises no more tears in the new order. Until that day comes, we will rightly mourn for those who won't let themselves get caught up in the joy of communion. They don't realize that God looks upon all of us and says, "We're a lot alike!"

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