

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR C

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

(Excerpts from Pope Francis to Youths - 24 April 2016)

by Father Charles Fillion

19 May 2019

Brothers and sisters, what an enormous responsibility the Lord gives us today! He tells us that the world will recognize the disciples of Jesus by the way they love one another. Love, in other words, is the Christian's identity card, the only valid "document" identifying us as Christians. If this card expires and is not constantly renewed, we stop being witnesses of the Master. The true friends of Jesus stand out essentially by the *genuine love*; not some "pie in the sky" love; no, it is a genuine love that shines forth in their way of life. Love is always shown in real actions. Those who are not real and genuine and who speak of love are like characters in a soap opera, some fake love story. Let us learn from him, for his words are a *school of life*, a school where we learn to love. This is a task which we must engage in every day: to learn how to love.

Before all else, love *is beautiful*, it is the path to happiness. But it is not an easy path. It is demanding and it requires effort. Think, for example, of when we receive a gift. It makes us happy, but receiving a gift means that someone generous has invested time and effort; by their gift they also give us a bit of themselves, a sacrifice they have made. To love *means to give*, not only something material, but also something of one's self: one's own time, one's friendship, one's own abilities.

Look to the Lord, who is never outdone in generosity. We receive so many gifts from him, and every day we should thank him... Even if we forget to do so, he never forgets, each day, to give us some special gift. It is not something material and tangible that we can use, but something even greater, a life-long gift. He offers us *his faithful friendship*, which he will never take back. The Lord is a friend forever. Even if you disappoint him and walk away from him, Jesus continues to want the best for you and to remain close to you; he believes in you even more than you believe in yourself. This is an example of genuine love that Jesus teaches to us. The biggest threat comes from thinking that no one cares about us - from feeling that we are all alone.

The freedom that the Lord gives to us is his love for us. He is always close to each one of us. There is always a temptation to let our affections be tainted by an instinctive desire to take, "to have" what we find pleasing; this is selfishness. Our consumerist culture reinforces this tendency. Yet when we hold on too tightly to something, it fades, it dies, and then we feel confused, empty inside. The Lord, if you listen to his voice, will reveal to you the secret of love. It is *caring for* others, respecting them, protecting them and serving them. This is putting tenderness and love into action.

Freedom is not the ability simply to do what I want. This makes us self-centred, and it prevents us from being open and sincere friends; it is not true to say “it is good enough if it serves me”. Instead, freedom is the gift of *being able to choose the good*: this is true freedom. The free person is the one who chooses what is good, what is pleasing to God, even if it requires effort, even if it is not easy. Do not be content with mediocrity, with “simply going with the flow”, with being comfortable and laid back.

Don't believe those who would distract you from the real treasure, *which you are*, by telling you that life is beautiful only if you have many possessions. Be sceptical about people who want to make you believe that you are only important if you act tough like the heroes in films or if you wear the latest fashions. Your happiness has no price. It cannot be bought: it is not an app that you can download on your phones nor will the latest update bring you freedom and grandeur in love. True freedom is something else altogether.

That is because love is a *free gift* which calls for an open heart; love is a responsibility, but a *noble responsibility* which is life-long! Love is nurtured by trust, respect and forgiveness. Love does not happen because we talk about it, but when we live it: it is not a sweet poem to study and memorize, but is a life choice to put into practice! How can we grow in love? The secret, once again, is the Lord: Jesus gives us himself in the Mass, he offers us forgiveness and peace in Confession. There we learn to receive his love, to make it ours and to give it to the world.

And when loving seems hard, when it is difficult to say no to something wrong, look up at Jesus on the cross, embrace the cross and don't ever let go of his hand. He will lead you ever higher, and pick you up whenever you fall. Throughout life we will fall many times, because we are sinners, we are weak. But there is always the hand of God who picks us up, who raises us up. Jesus wants us to be up on our feet!

I know that you are capable of acts of great friendship and goodness. With these you are called to build the future, *together* with others and for others, but never *against* anyone! Be like sporting champions, who attain high goals by quiet daily effort and practice. Let your daily programme be the works of mercy. Enthusiastically practice them, so as to be *champions in life, champions in love*! In this way you will be recognized as disciples of Jesus. In this way, you will have the identification card of the Christian.