

5th Sunday of Easter

LOVE one another, says the LORD

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Rather than absence, presence makes the heart grow fonder. We look for tangible signs to indicate our loved ones are still present. These take the form of photos, keepsakes, and lockets. We seek to make present the legacy of the past. Today's readings build on these human inclinations. They suggest we must make God present in a variety of ways. Presence makes the heart grow fonder. In the first reading, Luke stresses the need for perseverance in the faith, and growth through persecution. He indicates the importance of a visible presence of God in the community. This is done through appointing of elders. "Elders" was a term used in Judaism. At the time of this writing (Acts), presbyters were being appointed. We can substitute presbyters for elders. The work of Paul and Barnabas opens the door of faith to the Gentiles. Paul overcomes opposition to share with the Gentiles. Paul's presence makes the heart grow fonder.

In the second reading, the persecuted Christian community is encouraged to persevere to ensure the divine presence. The disappearance of the sea signals the end of evil: the dragon is confined and punished, victory of creation over chaos, life over Jerusalem descends from heaven to become God's unique dwelling place. Historical Jerusalem had recently been destroyed. Its restoration was not expected. The bride was another symbol of eschatological union of the faithful with their God.

In the Gospel Jesus connects his glorification to his departure. His leaving will challenge the Apostles. They are to keep him present in the love they show for one another. This love command is grounded not in the love command of Judaism but in the self-offering of Jesus. Wherever such self-giving love is found, people will recognize the disciples of Jesus.

Today's readings speak to a variety of people: the official proclaimers of the word (Paul and Barnabas), the elders (presbyters), and to the rank and file (the people in the pews). They speak of God's presence in the world. Wherever one offers consolation to another, God is present. If one lends a helping hand to the unfortunate, God is present. Wherever and whenever one speaks out for justice and honesty God is present. Love reveals our God and so makes a presence that makes the heart grow fonder.