

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.

V Sunday of Easter
AMS Memorial Mass
19 May 2019



Some American captives in the occupied Philippines during World War II described a Christmas celebration held in absolute simplicity. The POW's had to organize their celebration around the essentials. For Catholics and non-Catholics alike, the Mass held a special place. A Holy Cross Brother, Rex, with his family thousands of miles away and lacking so many basic necessities, called that Christmas Day in 1944 the happiest in his life. "sitting quietly before the Blessed Sacrament with the whole of my possessions on me—a pair of shorts and a pair of wooden sandals—I fully realized I had all that I needed."¹

I suppose that many of us have spent the holidays far from home and family. I did many times even before I adopted Cardinal Spellman's tradition of spending Christmas in a deployed location. One of things you experience is the ability to celebrate and appreciate what is essential to the message of the Incarnation which reaches its fullness in the Paschal victory. When we stop to participate in the AMS memorial celebration, we, too, consider what is essential.

The Word of God guides us with considerations regarding the organization and structure of the community of faith formed by the glory of God. Thus we are prepared to meditate on the profound message of love that Jesus teaches to us.

The new communities described in the Acts of the Apostles were the result of the evangelizing mission: the first fruit of the Resurrection and Pentecost. The love of the Risen One pushed the apostolic community out of its comfort zone into new horizons. The Risen

¹ Hennel, "A Prisoner of War Remembers", quoted by John Wukovits, *Soldiers of a Different Cloth*, p. 196.

Lord “possesses a power of love which surpasses every limit, never stops before any obstacle and wants to reunite humanity into one people, one Church.”²

We know that as a partially human community of faith, the Church must have an organization and structure. It is merely called the Way at this point. What we have continued for centuries in the process of evangelization has its roots in the communities founded by the Apostles. There may be some variations, but the reality is there.

For two thousand years the message has been unchanged: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, suffered, died, and rose to live among us forever. All things are made new in His Resurrection. You and I are His witnesses charged with the mission of announcing and initiating the signs of a new heaven and a new earth.

The new heaven and a new earth mentioned in the Book of Revelation is related to the concept of glory in the Fourth Gospel. The departure of Judas to betray the Lord is the framework for the beginning of the consideration of glory. The supreme moment of glorification is the passion, death, and Resurrection of the Lord, considered as the hour in St. John’s Gospel. Not exactly what we consider when we think of glory. Jesus recognizes this moment as the highlight and purpose of His mission—what is ours?

The glory of the Lord is His generous love. When we love each other, Jesus continues to be present in us in a very concrete way. Love of God and neighbor was already present in Old Testament, but Jesus adds a model to the precept: “as I have loved you.”

As the Bishop of Rome said at the Regina Coeli this noon: “The newness [of this precept] is completely found in the love of Jesus Christ, with which He has given His life for us. It is the love of God, universal, without conditions, and without limits, which found its apex on the cross.”³

Jesus loves the Father and fulfilled His command with perfect generosity. That is how He calls us to love.⁴ Where do we find the strength to imitate this example and love as He did? In Holy Communion when He enters us and transforms us. Almighty God will never propose anything to us that is beyond our strength or ability to fulfill.

We consider the universality of the mandate to love. Jesus defines it as loving as the Father loves. That restricts our ability to choose those that we will love, resisting the temptation of human nature to push us in that direction. We learn from the example of the Lord Jesus: He washed the feet of Judas and ate with him, but He knew that Judas would hand Him over. In the case of Peter: the Lord Jesus gave him a mandate and shared the Eucharist with him and ordained him, but He knew about Peter’s weakness and betrayal.

That powerful example is useful in our world where people are so often categorized and dismissed. Christians cannot faithfully behave that way. We cannot simply follow the world, divide people into camps, and choose which ones merit our love and which not. Fidelity to the precept of charity prevents us from determining its meaning.⁵

² Albert Vanhoye, *Le Letture bibliche delle Domeniche*, C, p. 139.

³ Pope Francis, Regina Coeli, 19>V.19.

⁴ Cf. Vanhoye, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-7.

⁵ Cf. Daniel H. Muegggenborg, *Come Follow Me C*, p.84.

Certainly those we honor today served the Nation and put their lives in peril without knowing everyone they were serving: whether they were good or bad. They simply served all.

Does not authentic service to the Nation also express fidelity to the commandment of love? It is recognition of that service that beckons us this afternoon.

You know that this annual celebration is an occasion to pray especially for the eternal repose of those who have fallen either on the battlefield or years later. We pray in a particular way for those retired chaplains and other priests who have passed away since our last gathering. We also honor those who serve in the military, those who serve beyond our borders, the Veterans, and those who are wounded in body and spirit. We beg divine mercy upon all of them and we ask for the stamina to imitate their love.

They exhibit an understanding of the divine commandment, so fundamental and emblematic of the Christian community for all times and in all places. Love makes evident the presence of the Lord and His community. The sacrifice of the military also pushes us forward in the quest for a lasting peace. It is impossible to look at the faces of young men and women committed to bearing arms in service of the Nation and not shudder at the tragedy of losing even one young life.

At the end of Mass I will thank the military attachés of the Colombian, Chilean, Ecuadorian, Spanish, and Mexican Embassies for their presence here. What I urge them to do in Spanish, I will repeat here. Each one of us who believes in Jesus Christ and the power of His Resurrection must strive to foster dialogue and understanding between people. As we your bishops said in a recent pastoral letter: “When we begin to separate people in our thoughts for unjust reasons, when we start to see some people as “them” and others as “us,” we fail to love. Yet love is at the heart of the Christian life.” “Love compels each of us to resist racism courageously... and to begin to change policies and structures that allow racism to persist.”⁶

The Armed Services have something to teach here in pioneering efforts in this Country to value a person for his competence, membership on the team, and participation in the mission.

We have to follow the example of Jesus and love as He teaches. Allow me a banal example from yesterday. I was using the popular app “Waze” to move from a parish where I celebrated confirmation to reach Union Station. At a certain point it took me off 395 to put me back on a spur of the same road.

I was a bit impatient with this seemingly senseless direction until I looked over at the road where I would have been caught in a huge traffic jam. The counsel to take the detour was most useful. Waze is not infallible, the Lord Jesus is. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

⁶ US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*, pp. 17-18.

We are His disciples and strive to love as He did. We accept the challenge to dare to be different. We resist the constant tendency of the world to penetrate the Church urging her to take over its spirit. The self-giving so typical of the military and their families strikes the proper chord here. Brother Rex may not have been a chaplain, but he understood what was important as he prayed before the Blessed Sacrament during his captivity in the Philippines in 1944. Ultimately, “This is how all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”⁷

⁷ Jn. 13:35.