

5th Sunday of Easter

The book of Revelation is one long vision that John had while he was in exile on the island of Patmos. It was a vision with many different symbolic messages. Scripture scholars have been trying to decipher these messages for centuries. We hear of one of those fantastic visions in our second reading today (Rev 21:1-5a).

John “saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” (v.2) OK, so what is John saying that the new Jerusalem is prepared as a bride? How can a city be called, or compared to a bride? The new Jerusalem that is coming down out of heaven from God is the Church. The Church since the beginning has been called the bride of Christ. After all, Jesus died on the cross to save His bride; and Jesus continually gives Himself to His bride to purify her for the final day of the resurrection. So, this vision of the new Jerusalem as a bride is one that is meant to show us about the end of time. This is when time will cease, and God will be all in all (see 1 Cor 15:20-28). Jesus will present His bride, the Church, to His heavenly Father. We are that bride, or that Church, or that new Jerusalem that John is talking about in his vision.

I think we can understand this a little better about this when we know about the preparations for a wedding of the ancient Jews. Before a wedding, a bride would take a “ritual bath”. This was more than a cleansing of the body. It was also symbolic of the cleansing of sin, so that a bride would be pure inside and out. It was also ancient Jewish custom that the bride would leave her family and join her husband’s family after the wedding. So, the groom would want to present his pure and beautiful bride to the patriarch of his family. (*Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told*, Brant Pitre)

As most of you know already that it takes a lot of work to get prepared for a wedding. Those of you who have prepared for a wedding know all about the many details that are involved. There are also preparations for the day of the wedding. A man once remarked that it is easy for the groom to get ready. He takes a shower, combs his hair, puts on his tux, and he is ready. The bride usually takes a little longer to get prepared. Many times (although this is not always the case) there is the hairdresser that has to make the bride’s hair look stunning. There is also the makeup session, in which the mascara is applied to enhance the beauty of the bride. All of this is done to make the bride as beautiful as possible on her wedding day. When it is time for the bride to enter the wedding, all of the people usually go “Wow, she looks stunning!” Well, this is what Jesus is doing to help prepare His bride. Jesus wants His bride to be as stunningly beautiful as possible.

So, what does the bride of Christ have to do in order to be prepared for the wedding? We get a clue to this in the first reading. St. Paul says, “It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) Oh my, that doesn’t sound as much fun as getting your hair fixed up and putting on makeup. Or trying on all those wedding gowns in order to find the perfect one, does it? No, it doesn’t. In order for the bride of Christ to be prepared for the wedding at the end of time the bride has to endure many trials and tribulations during life. There is the matter of taking up our cross and following Jesus every day. There is the matter of suffering for the sake of the Gospel. St. Paul understood this very well, and that is why he said, “It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” He wasn’t just talking about himself. He was speaking for every disciple of Christ in every age. It is through many hardships and suffering the we, (the bride, the Church, the new Jerusalem) are being purified and being made ready to be presented to our heavenly Father. We, the bride, are being made ready to enter the groom’s family – that is, our heavenly Father’s house or kingdom.

It is more than just enduring hardships and suffering though. It is also how we endure these hardships. It is how we take up our cross everyday and follow Jesus. Jesus tells us one very important way in the Gospel reading that we heard today. Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13:34-35) To love one another as Jesus loves us is not easy. Many times, it involves hardship. Many times, the love that we have for others is not returned with equal measure, or it might even be rejected completely. We know from looking at a crucifix that Jesus’ love was rejected too. Yet, Jesus continued to love,

even the ones that persecuted Him. We are asked to continue to love in the same way, with this unconditional love that Jesus gives to His people.

If we endure these hardships. If we continue to love as Jesus loves. If we persevere throughout our lives this way until the end, the better prepared we will be to meet the Lord. If we cooperate with God's grace in this way throughout our lives then we will become the pure and beautiful bride that Jesus is looking for. Then when this pure and beautiful bride is presented to the Father God will be further glorified when He is all in all.