

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

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Homily by  
Fr. Jon Pedigo

How many of us have had the uncomfortable situation when we got up from the table to leave, but were so fearful of leaving because we knew immediately that our friends would be saying something mean about us? This scenario is played out in junior high school lunchrooms and executive boardrooms.



Today's gospel puts a bit of a twist on that dynamic. It begins after Judas got up from the table. The conversation, however, was not *about Judas*, but rather, about the disciples themselves. When Judas got up they didn't say, "Hey, that Judas sure has a bad attitude." Or "Get him!" No Jesus said, **"I give you a new commandment: love one another.** The relevance of this line is found in the disciples' reaction to Judas' betrayal.

The verses immediately following this gospel selection deal with Peter's reaction to Judas' betrayal: **"Will you lay down your life for me? Amen, amen, I say to you, the cock will not crow before you deny me three times."**

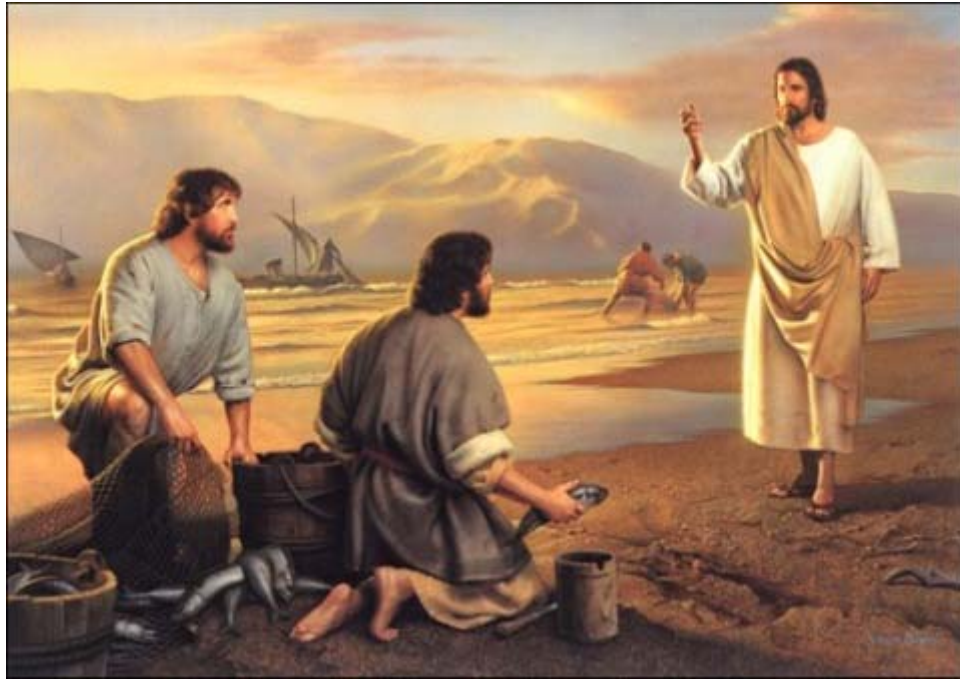
Here the theme of fear is introduced: The fear of arrest motivated Peter's denial. Today's gospel, then, calls us to look more closely at both fear and love.



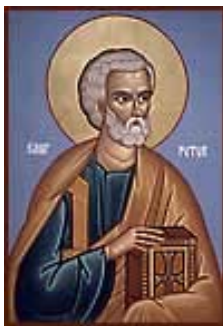
Judas' betrayal of Jesus set the crucifixion in motion. As Judas got up from the table, Jesus initiated his discourse on love. Will the disciples be able to maintain the vision of love after the betrayal?



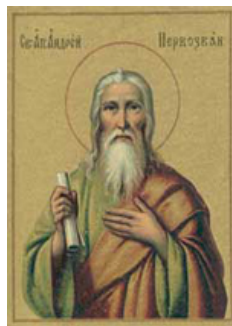
Point in fact, after Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples still struggled with fear. After Jesus rose from the tomb, we found the disciples huddled behind closed doors. Jesus appeared in their midst and confronted their fears with the wounds in his hands and side. Even after Jesus came to them several times, they were not out on the streets sharing the good news.



They simply returned to work and kept their faith anonymous. By all indications, it would seem that fear, not the love of God, still guided their lives. The turning point for the disciples came when they realized that the fullness of The Spirit came upon them, and they themselves had to be the message and messengers of love. They had to come to accept the commandment to love others as they themselves had been loved.



Peter



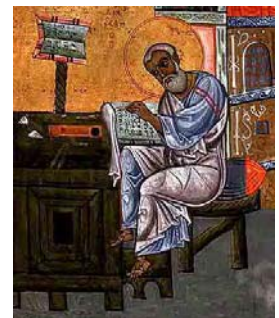
Andrew



Thomas



Thaddeus



Matthew

This process was not an "all at once" process. The disciples had to reject fear in order to GET INVOLVED. Their choice to act, then, was based on Love. Love seldom promises safety nor does love provide guarantees that things will be all right. Love merely promises freedom from fear and assures us of Eternal Life.

We stand in a new world. We live in a world where fear plays a major role in our lives. Political rhetoric says, "I can make you safe. Listen to me, my policies, my plan will put an end to all evil doers!" We are fooled into believing such rhetoric. Our personal fear gets the better of us.



Fearful of unseen enemies, of invisible terrorists, of teeming migrant hoards looking to take over our jobs, schools and neighborhoods, we fall prey to such fear-based rhetoric. Consumed in our own fear, we fail to realize that fear breeds panic. Panic results in hastily constructed policies that curb our movements, limit our rights and give license to dehumanize our supposed enemies through sanctioned violence.



Our recent history has shown that religious leaders also play into fear. When religious leaders fail to preach love and only affirm fear, there is a deep spiritual vacuum. The spiritual vacuum makes policies of fear seem reasonable. We accept – albeit reluctantly, war. We acquiesce to torture. We tolerate the expulsion of people who are labeled as sinners or deviants. We resign our faith and Judas wins.

This is indeed a dim picture. Is it realistic? Does it strike a chord? Are you not tired of fear? Don't you want to hear something different not for the sake of difference, but something that actually counters fear?



We have the Table of Christ. The Table of Christ, the Eucharist is a natural corrective to doom and gloom. Look at the resurrection appearance stories in John's gospel: at the juncture of post resurrection appearances, how did Jesus reveal himself? At the breaking of bread! Each breaking of bread is an IN-BREAKING of God's love for us. The disciples' eyes were opened and they knew that he was in the breaking of bread. The stranger was no longer a potential threat, but rather the Lord himself.

The Eucharist reveals to us the new heaven and the new earth, for here at the table, as it says in Revelation, "God dwells with us." God's love sends us forth from this table into a world manipulated by politics and religious rhetoric of fear. Christ himself prepared us through his Love for us. As we ourselves become Love through Eucharist, we are sent forth to break bread with those who are weary from being told that security is more important than liberty, ... that violence will bring peace, that segregation and deportation will bring justice, ... that isolation will bring prosperity.

Our message must be clear, simple and uncompromising: **"I give you a new commandment: love one another."** Let us then fulfill this commandment.

## Reflection:

- 1) What do you feel that the statement, "Perfect love casts out all fear" is realistic?
- 2) Have you had a difficult time dealing with issues of fear and intimacy? What has helped you overcome fear?
- 3) Many critics who favor immigration reform comment that the position and rhetoric of anti-immigration reform people is basically about the "politics of fear." Some critics of the War and Occupation in Iraq state that people have been manipulated by a "politics of fear."

Do you believe that politicians and religious leaders use fear-based rhetoric as a way to manipulate people?