

Opening the Word: The scandal of abiding



If you are looking to sell a book on Christian discipleship, you need a radical title. The kind of title that underlines the transformative and revolutionary adventure of Christian life.

And yet, most of life is neither transformative nor revolutionary. The routines of day-to-day life do not easily exist alongside a quest for adventure. Children are to be bathed, taught, fed and played with. Work must be done, Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday passing in turn.

Jesus teaches us on this Fifth Sunday of Easter that the heart of Christian discipleship is not necessarily constant change but faithful abiding. Before his hour has arrived upon the cross, Jesus in the Gospel of John gives his disciples a new commandment: “This is my new commandment: love one another as I love you” (Jn 15:12).

This commandment is given right after the text for today’s Gospel. Jesus tells us that he is the vine, and if we are to bear fruit, we must remain attached to the vine. We must abide with Jesus.

[May 2, 2021 – Fifth Sunday of Easter](#)

Acts 9:26-31
Ps 22:26-27, 28, 30,
31-32
1 Jn 3:18-24
Jn 15:1-8

We are to remain with Jesus, and that remaining means letting his words dwell in us. All that he has said in the Gospels.

All that he has done. We must let these words echo in our heart. To become a disciple who keeps the new commandment: love one another as Christ loved us.

Abide in him.

Abiding is prophetic language for us late moderns. We are formed to move from job to job. We think that every relationship is expendable if we find it tiresome or a burden. We get easily bored, and when we do, we have a smartphone to distract us. Link after link on the internet takes us to endless page after endless page of novel information.

This frenetic activity, this instability of the heart, is contrary to the disposition of abiding.

Do you want to know the secret of Christian life? Commit yourself to abiding with Jesus in the Church. Commit yourself to the forgotten virtue of stability.

Think about your parish. It is likely not a remarkable place, at least when compared to the sports arena or the concert hall. Yes, the Lord of heaven and earth comes to dwell upon the parish altar every day of the week.

But who else is there? There is the 75-year-old woman who attends daily Mass. She writes the same prayer in the book of intentions each week. She lights a candle each week on the way out.

There are the parents with uncontrollable children at the Sunday 10 a.m. Mass. They strive to keep their toddler in the pew, but the toddler regularly runs to the altar despite their protestations. And yet, they are faithfully present.

There is the out of tune gentleman, incapable of holding a pitch, who nonetheless sings each hymn as if Carnegie Hall is the next stop on his imagery tour.

In a parish, there are sinners and saints, the bitter and the

joyful, those who pray and those who have no idea how to raise their voice to God.

Abide with them.

That is the marvelous secret of Christian life. Abide with Jesus by loving those whom Jesus loves.

We do not need to look for anything more remarkable than concrete, self-emptying, mundane Christian love in the parish.

If the Lord of heaven and earth has chosen to dwell among us in love, if he has pitched his tent among us, then can we not do the same? Can we not dwell with one another day after day in love?

Maybe this kind of abiding is revolutionary after all.

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