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5th Sunday of Easter

Date: Sunday, May 18, 2025 | **Season:** Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Acts 14:21–27
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145:8–13 | **Response:** Psalm 145:1
Second Reading: Revelation 21:1–5a
Gospel Acclamation: John 13:34
Gospel Reading: John 13:31–33a, 34–35
Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House **in the** Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia**.**

Have you ever had to return to a place where it once hurt? Where the wounds still whisper, where the memories weigh heavy? The hardest journeys are often those that bring us back—to the roots of pain, to the soil where love must be lived again, even when it hurts.

This morning, as Pope Leo XIV takes up the Petrine ministry in Rome, the universal Church stands on the shoulders of apostles who dared to return. They went back not out of nostalgia but out of necessity—back to cities where they had been rejected, to communities where life had almost been lost. They did not seek comfort or glory. They returned to strengthen souls, to rekindle faith, to build communion.

In the first reading from Acts, Paul and Barnabas retrace their steps to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. These names might sound distant to us, but for them, these were places marked by struggle and wounds. Their return was not a triumphant parade, but a gritty pilgrimage of trust. Because the Church's mission is not to tally victories, but to weave a web of communion—faithful, resilient, and patient.

You can imagine their feet, blistered and calloused. Their faces, weary but shining. Their message of encouragement was not proclaimed from grand temples or lofty pulpits, but shared intimately—in homes, around kitchen tables, in the quiet pain of a community learning that resurrection is real, even when it remains hidden behind suffering. "Remain faithful. Do not lose heart. Through many persecutions we must enter the Kingdom of God."

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Here in Zambia, we know something of this hope. In compounds where taps run dry, in clinics short on medicine but rich in prayer, in the footsteps of a student walking five kilometres each day because education matters—we see resurrection in real time. In families choosing the dignity of honest work over corruption, in hearts refusing despair. Resurrection is not an escape from reality; it is God's definitive "Yes" inside our most stubborn "No."

The Psalmist gives voice to this hope: "The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness." In a world riddled with broken promises—by politicians, corporations, even sometimes within the Church—God's faithfulness is our anchor. God's covenant never fails. His Kingdom endures through every generation.

In our second reading, John's vision in Revelation unfolds before us: a new heaven and a new earth. Not an escape to a distant realm, but a home where God pitches His tent among mortals. This is not a palace but a tent—fragile, vulnerable, moving with the people. God dwells not above, but amid the poor, the displaced, the forgotten. Catholic Social Teaching reminds us: human dignity is not a slogan; it is a sanctuary where God's presence dwells within each of us.

And in the Gospel, Jesus speaks. The room is dim; Judas has just left; the cross looms ahead. "Now the Son of Man has been glorified," He says. Glory in John's Gospel begins not with triumph but betrayal. Love is revealed not in comfort but crisis. "Love one another as I have loved you." Not as you find easy or convenient, not as the world expects, but as I have loved you—unto the washing of feet, unto the cross, unto the silence of the tomb that could not hold Him.

This is the new commandment—new not because love was never commanded before, but because this love is measured not in convenience or reciprocity, but in total self-gift. It looks like the Eucharist: poured out, broken open, given freely.

Maybe this is the love that must animate the Church today. As Pope Leo XIV assumes the Chair of Peter, may his first act be proximity—not power. May he draw close to the poor, the peripheries, those overlooked by others. Let his pontificate model mercy, not might; presence, not prestige.

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Like Paul and Barnabas returning to painful places, Pope Leo XIV steps into his ministry determined to embody love that bridges divides, fosters communion, and builds peace. His is not a Church turned inward but, following Francis, a field hospital open to all wounds—a common table welcoming all, not a fortress guarding secrets. In an age scarred by division—political and ecclesial—he will walk the slow, difficult road toward peace: peace in families, peace among nations, peace within the Body of Christ. Not with slogans, but with quiet resolve; not with clenched fists, but open hands and a heart committed to healing.

And we, too, are invited to return. To the places where we were hurt or misunderstood. To the people we gave up on. To communities that demand love not in word but in deed. Let us return—not because it is easy, but because resurrection is true. Let us be a Church that does not flee suffering but transforms it; a Church that does not just preach justice but lives it. A Church that makes its home in the very places the world has abandoned.

This is the hope Pope Leo XIV carries—not as a proclamation, but as a posture. In his bearing and gaze, he calmly signals a deep concern for communion—among nations, cultures, and hearts long divided. He dares to build bridges where walls have stood too long, to foster unity where suspicion bred silence. His is a vision of a Church moving forward with the whole People of God journeying together, synodally; of a church turned outward, fearless in sharing the Good News of the Gospel.

Because the Gospel doesn't just send us forward—it calls us deeper. Deeper into love. Deeper into fidelity. Deeper into the dazzling mystery that God is still making all things new.

As we enter this new week, I invite you to enter a time of prayer and reflection, in the spirit of the Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. Imagine yourself standing with Paul and Barnabas, preparing to return to where it once hurt. Ask: What is God asking me to return to—not to reopen wounds, but to witness to love and the grace that has been freely given?

Here are three examen questions for your prayer this week:

- Where am I being called to return—not for comfort, but for communion?
- Who is God inviting me to love—not because they deserve it, but because Christ already did?

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- What sign of resurrection am I being asked to notice, nurture, and share—right here, in my community in Zambia today?

Let us not seek glory where the world looks. Let us seek it in faithfulness—in feet that return, hands that serve, and love that outlasts the grave.

For we joyfully proclaim: Christ is risen. He is truly risen. Alleluia.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.