Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ
https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/

Friday of the 5th Week of Easter

Date: Friday, May 23, 2025 | **Season:** Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Acts 15:22–31
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 57:8–10, 12 | **Response:** Psalm 57:10a
Gospel Acclamation: John 15:15b
Gospel Reading: John 15:12–17
Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House **in the** Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia**.**

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we gather today, let us reflect on the call that has shaped our lives, the call to follow Christ in religious life. Do we ever pause to consider the depth of this commitment, the daily sacrifices, and the immense privilege of living in intimate union with our Lord? Today, the readings offer us a powerful reminder of the very essence of our vocation: the path of love.

In our first reading from Acts, we witness the early Church grappling with a challenge that threatened to fracture their unity. The Apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, made a decision rooted in understanding and fellowship, sending Silas and Barsabbas to Antioch. This was not merely a resolution of a dispute; it was the Spirit leading them towards deeper communion, choosing harmony over discord. This resonates deeply with today's Gospel, where Jesus gives us a commandment that is both simple and all-encompassing: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you".

But what does it truly mean for us, as religious, to love as Jesus loves? It is more than a fleeting emotion; it is the very foundation of our consecrated life. Jesus Himself embodies this love: a love that is selfless, sacrificial, and unwavering. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends". This love is not confined to grand gestures; it is present in the daily moments of our lives, in our commitment to prayer, our dedication to service, and our willingness to embrace community life. As we hear in Psalm 57, our hearts should be awake and full of praise, giving thanks to the Lord among all peoples, recognizing that His steadfast love is as high as the heavens.

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Consider the unique challenges and opportunities we face in our religious communities and ministries. Many of you work tirelessly in education, healthcare, social services, or pastoral care, often serving the most marginalized and vulnerable members of society. How can we embody Jesus' commandment in these circumstances?

It begins with recognizing Christ in each person we encounter, especially those we serve. When you minister to a patient in the hospital, remember Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me".

It means embracing the joys and challenges of community life with patience, understanding, and a spirit of forgiveness. Remember that our religious communities are meant to be schools of love, where we learn sto support and uplift one another.

It calls us to be prophetic voices in the world, advocating for justice, peace, and the dignity of all people. Remember that our consecrated life is a witness to the Kingdom of God, a sign of hope in a world often marked by division and despair.

This calls us to act with justice and compassion in our communities. Support local initiatives that provide education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for those in need. Advocate for fairer policies that protect the vulnerable and promote the common good. Remember that Christian love is not mere sentimentalism but a transformative force that seeks the good of all.

This love isn't always easy. It requires us to step outside of our comfort zones, to challenge injustice, and to forgive those who have wronged us. But remember, we are not alone. The same Holy Spirit that guided the Apostles in Jerusalem is with us today, empowering us to love as Christ loved. Forgiveness is an essential aspect of this love, reflecting God's own forgiveness towards us.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, in his Spiritual Exercises, invites us to reflect on our response to Christ's love. He asks us: "What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?" Let us take these questions to heart and allow them to guide our actions in the coming days.

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Instead of simply asking you to ponder these questions, I want to offer some concrete actions you can take this week:

- Renew your commitment to prayer: Spend extra time in personal prayer, asking God to fill you with His love and to guide your actions.
- Practice active listening in community: Make a conscious effort to listen attentively to your fellow religious, seeking to understand their perspectives and needs.
- Identify a specific act of service you can perform: Look for opportunities to help those in need, whether within your community or in your ministry.

I challenge each of you to choose one of these actions and commit to it this week. And at the next community faith-sharing, I invite you to share your experiences with the community, so that we may encourage and support one another in our journey of love.

> "This I command you: love one another".

This is not merely a suggestion; it is the very essence of our faith. When we love as Christ loved, we not only transform the world around us but also find our own hearts transformed. We discover the joy and fulfillment that comes from living in accordance with God's will.

Let us go forth, then, with a renewed commitment to love. Let us be the hands and feet of Christ in our homes, in our communities, and in the world. And may the love of God, which surpasses all understanding, fill our hearts and guide our actions, now and forever. Amen.

Let us pray together:

> Loving God, we thank you for the gift of our vocation and for the opportunity to serve you in religious life. Fill our hearts with your Holy Spirit, that we may love one another as Christ loved us. Give us the grace to embrace the challenges of community life with patience and understanding, and to be prophetic voices in the world, advocating for justice and peace. Help us to see Christ in each person we encounter, especially those we serve, and to respond to their needs with compassion and generosity.

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> May your love transform our hearts and our communities, so that we may be a beacon of hope and a testament to your boundless love. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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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.