

“New Commandment”

Sunday, May 19, 2019: Fifth Sunday of Easter
Acts 13:44-52/Psalm 145/Revelation 21:1-6/John 13:31-35

Bishop Ricardo Alcaraz

We have the Risen Lord who has the victory over everything. No matter what happens, we can always come before the presence of God Almighty. In behalf of our nation, lay our petitions and supplications before the Lord Our God. Jesus said that the ability to bind and lose has been given to His Church.

During the elections, you might have the right candidates or the not so right candidate there; what matters is that we come before heaven and the Lord our God in behalf of our nation. What changes the course of our lives and of this nation is our relationship with our God.

Of the many things that we can learn from our Scriptures today, I believe God is giving emphasis to this: *let us bring glory and honor to the Lord through the lives that we live.*

Our gospel happened at the Last Supper, just after Judas left. Verse 31-33 says, “³¹ So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. ³² If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. ³³ Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you.”

When Jesus Christ was baptized in the River Jordan, we heard the Father saying, “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased.” Jesus is the beloved Son whose heart is to carry out the will and the purpose of the Father. Jesus did not come down to earth to prove that He was different from the Father. He did not come down to earth to prove that He can build His own empire aside from the Father.

We will find Jesus saying things like, “The words I say to you, these are the words I heard from My Father; the works that I do, these are the works I have seen My Father do.” We find in Jesus the desire to honor the Father and to bring glory unto His Father. Jesus said, “If you believe in Me, then, the works that I do, you shall do also; and even greater works than these you will do.” Just as He came down to bring glory and honor to the Father, the Lord wants us to bring glory and honor to Him also. He doesn’t want us to compete with Him in greatness, but rather to give Him the honor in and through our lives and making it a lifestyle as we go about our lives here on earth.

With the word “glory” we sometimes think that it is when God begins to manifest Himself or His nature or His acts – God revealing Himself. What we want to do is to reveal the presence of God in and through our lives. Scripture says, “Christ in us is the hope of glory.” John said, “Greater is He who is in us than him that is in the world.” God is in us but He doesn’t want Him to be hidden in us. God is in us, but He wants to be unleashed in and through our lives.

When we say, “glorifying God,” we want Him to be seen. The phrase “to glorify” has three thoughts: *to extol; to honor; to magnify*. *To extol* means to praise highly; to laud; to speak well off. Normally, when we visit funerals, there is a eulogy for the deceased where we say nice things about the latter. I wonder why they say the nice things when a person is already dead. Why don’t we say the nice things when they are alive? Maybe, it can prevent an early death because we have encouraged a person. When we extol God, we declare all the good things that He has done for us. He is not a monster or a God who makes life difficult for us. He is our Father and it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the Kingdom.

To glorify God means *to honor*, which is to hold in high respect; to give reverence; to give a courteous regard. We do not want to take God for granted. We do not want to trivialize our Lord, but rather to treat Him with honor because He is an important person.

When someone gets married in Church, the necessary arrangements and details are done as to how the wedding will be done properly. Things are not done haphazardly to emphasize the importance of what is taking place. There are particulars prepared during the Mass because we give a high respect to the Lord our God.

To glorify God also means *to magnify* – to make Him seen greater or more important. It is to extol Him and to announce His greatness in and throughout our lives. This is what happens when we allow Jesus to be seen in and throughout our lives. John the Baptist said, “I want to decrease so that He might increase.” This is like him saying, “I want Him to be seen.” Smith Wigglesworth said, “*All of me, none of God; less of me, more of God; none of me; all of God.*” Scriptures says that we have died to Christ. St. Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life that I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Another translation says, “I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself.”

What does it mean to say: to live by faith in Jesus? This means we have faith in what God has done for us. We have faith that His sacrifice for us is complete. It is all that is needed to make us righteous before the Father. We have total and absolute freedom simply because of what Christ has done for us. We know that He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement for our peace and well-being was laid upon Him and by His

stripes, we are healed. We believe that this is a done deal, and when we come to Him, we come with faith in what He has done for us.

Another translation says, “Having the faith of the Son of God,” which means we believe in the things Jesus believed in. We believe in the purpose for which He came down to earth and died for us, and lived once again for us. We are saying to God, “We are no longer just interested in our own success, in achieving our own dreams, but to say, “Lord Jesus, we want to take Your dream and make them our dream. We would like to dream Your dreams and for You to continue Your life in and through our lives.” When we do this, we want to be able to live according to the ways of God. We want to live according to the principles of the kingdom of God.

The principle of the world is: me first. When we live a Christ-centered life, we are saying that Christ is number one. We are going to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of these things will be added unto us. We don’t insist on our ways, but rather, we say, “Lord, we want to take Your ways. We want to learn Your ways.” In the world, when somebody hurts us, we say, “Just wait, one day it is going to be pay-back time.” We are told not to get mad, but get even. When we are in Christ, He tells us to forgive. It may not sit well with us, but this is the way He wants us to live in the kingdom of God, and we choose to live this way.

I was recently in a retreat of the Diocese of Southern Luzon, and we were talking about the principles of God. One priest shared about his children going to college in the city. He wanted them to have a decent and comfortable life. They saved money, twenty thousand pesos, which was a lot for them, so that their children can live in one roof with a decent living condition. At the same time, they were also building their Church building. While they were praying to God for finances, the Lord spoke to the priest telling him to give the money that he saved for the building of the Church. The money intended for their children was placed into the Church building. It may not be enough, but it got them started.

The priest and his wife continued to pray, writing letters of solicitation, until one day, his classmate from abroad called him up. His classmate learned that he was a priest and that he needed funds for the Church. His classmate sent a check and when the priest converted the money give to Philippine peso, it amounted to two hundred thousand pesos.

Normally, we think of getting the resources first, and tithe ten percent of it. First time I heard where the Lord told a person to give the tithe first and get the whole gross amount later. The principle of God still works of seeking the kingdom of God and all of these things shall be added unto us.

Maybe things may not work out as dramatically for some of us, but the principles of the kingdom of God work if we put them to work and apply it in our lives. When we begin to live by the principles of God, nobody gets the glory except God.

In the gospel, it is too bad that one of Jesus' disciples, Judas, left early, and the reason he left was that he had a different agenda. He was going to sell out Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, and he missed this particular teaching of Jesus, and he missed this particular call. Judas had the opportunity to be part of the pillars – the twelve apostles of the Church, but somehow there were certain things in his life that he did not surrender before the Lord. He did not trust that the Lord's methods will work.

A commentator said that the reason Judas betrayed Jesus was because he wanted to force the Jesus in a situation where He would be forced to use His powers to liberate them from the Romans at that particular time. He further added that Judas saw that Jesus could heal the sick, He could give sight to the blind, He could multiply bread and fish, He could talk to the weather, He could raise the dead. Judas was probably thinking that if Jesus had all of this power in Him, then, He can force all the legions of angels that He was talking about to help and fast track the revolution and the liberation from the Romans. Judas tried to manipulate the events and tried to force Jesus into doing something, but then, Jesus gets captured, was beaten, scourged, slapped, and maybe he wondered when is Jesus going to use His power. It wasn't what he wanted so he threw the pieces of silver.

The problem with manipulation is that it doesn't always work this way of Judas. At the time of Daniel, the officers of the court manipulated the king to sign a law that if anyone praises God other than the king, he will be thrown at the lion's den. The king favored Daniel but he couldn't change the law, so he was thrown at the lion's den. Daniel praised God and he did not die. The king knew what the officers did, so they were thrown to the lion's den, and got killed.

At the time of Esther, Haman manipulated the king into making a law that all of the Jews in his region will be annihilated, but Esther fasted and prayed to God. The plans that Haman tried to push was reversed. Instead of Mordecai and Esther being killed, Haman was hanged in the gallows that he made.

When we don't trust the ways of God, and we try to insist on our ways, it doesn't work. Proverbs says, "Many are the plans in the heart of man, but the Lord's counsel, that will stand." If we will stand with the Lord, He will cause us to stand.

Jesus doesn't manipulate anything. He said, "Father, if it possible that You take this cup away from Me, but not My will, but Yours be done." He was always giving in to the Father, not manipulating events. When we obey God, we begin to show love for God. Verse 34-35 says,

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” ³⁵ *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* If we want to give glory to God, we operate the way He wants us to operate. If we want to identify with Christ, if we want to be known as His disciples, then, we should be known by our love.

There are Christians who are able to do great signs and wonders. There are Christians who are able to walk in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are certain Christians who are eloquent. There are certain Christians who are forceful and bright in their management. There are those who have memorized books from the Holy Scriptures. However, these are not how we are known to be disciples of Christ. We are measured by the love that we have for one another.

Jesus said, “This is a new commandment I give to you.” What makes it new? In Leviticus, it states to love one another, so what makes it new? It is the standard by which you love one another. Jesus Christ said, “As I have loved you, you also love one another.” The book of Romans says, “The love of God was demonstrated that while we were still sinners, He gave His Son. God did not say, “If I am going to do something about your situation, I am going to send My Son, but you have to show Me that you deserved Him. At least, make some amends. At least, improve your life.” Before we even make some steps toward God, even while we were stepping away from God, He sent His Son. God demonstrated His love by sending His Son to us.

When I was eleven years old at Grade Four at a boy’s school, there was a new student, an American, that came along and he was placed in my class. It was a new culture, a new system for him. He felt awkward now knowing any one, and some of my classmate would tease him. Occasionally, I would join them, and being new, he had to bear everything.

After school hours, waiting for the school bus, we had some playtime. In our school, there was an elevated alley and beside this was a wooden platform that was stuck to the alley. We would get a running start and when we would get to the edge of the alley, we would jump and clear the three-feet of wooden land. We did it many times, and I gave it one more shot. But when I came to the edge of the alley and took my jump, I found out that somebody moved the platform about a foot, so I landed on the edge, twisted my ankle, fell to the ground and I couldn’t breathe in pain and ask for help.

From the corner of my eye, I saw this American student running towards me with his bag in tow, and he came to me. He knelt down, and he recognized me as one of those who would tease him. He said, “Let me help you.” He put my arm around his shoulder, and he lifted me up. Together, we walked to the seat, and he stayed there until I was okay. I wanted him to go because I was embarrassed and I couldn’t look at him in the eye.

Even though I was one of those who made the life of the American boy miserable, it didn't matter to him. He saw me fall down. He saw me groping in pain, but without any hesitation, he came to my help without any guarantee that I or my friends aren't going to tease him again.

When I gave my life to the Lord, and I opened the Scriptures and found this verse, "Do not return evil for evil, but return good for evil," I thought about this American boy. I no longer remember his name or have a clear picture of his face, but all I know is the kind deed that he did for me during the time I fell and was in pain despite the fact that my classmates and I were causing him pain at that time. This is like Christ. The boy could have walked by and he could have said, "Karma," but he did not do it. He came; he helped me, and brought me back. This is what Christ has called us to do. I did not know his religious affiliations, and all I could remember is his one act of kindness.

God wants us to be Christ in the world and to live out His love in the world. The new commandment is to love each other. How do we know that we have loved enough? It is an open-ended command. It is not a checklist, a quota that we have to meet. Christ loved us while we were down, and now He is saying, "I want you to do the same thing." When we do what God tells us to do, when Christ is seen and revealed and manifested through our lives, then God is glorified in and through us.

Bring glory and honor to God by living His life and pursuing His purposes and becoming Him while we are here on earth. Let us believe God, for the Holy Spirit to give us the grace, the power, and the strength to bring glory to Him by our love for Him and for each other.