

Year C Fifth Sunday of Easter
Acts 14:21-27; Ps 145; Rev 21:1-5^a; Jn 13:31-33^a, 34-35
by Emilio G. Chávez

The first reading continues Luke's account in Acts of the growth and spread of the Church, its consolidation, now in Gentile lands. The conversion to the Christian faith of the first Gentiles (non-Jews, pagans) will present certain issues to the Church leaders, which will be discussed and resolved in next Sunday's first reading. The first reading today relates certain travels of Paul and Barnabas (Paul is the hero of the second part of Acts) and how they organized the churches they had founded (in this early period, "elders" govern the churches, as "elders" were leaders in Judaism). It is a Church on the move, traveling to new places and experiences new things. At Antioch, where the first Gentiles had been preached to and admitted to the Church (Acts 11:19-26), this as yet amazing novelty—that former pagans, to be avoided at all costs by good Jews, were to be allowed a share in the People of God—was reported to the church there. Controversy will follow, as we shall see.

In the second reading, we are given a glimpse of the future consummation of God's marriage relationship with his people, begun in Christ (Jn 3:29; Mk 2:19-20), but still an unfulfilled hope: we are not all one people united in Christ, feasting at the table of the Kingdom of God (Lk 14:12-15; 22:28-30). We still cry, and many bitterly, and there is much death and wailing in our world. Only those who neglect the poor of the Body of Christ can fail to see and feel this. But in Christ, all things are made new (see also 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).

In John's gospel, there is a central paradox, an irony: Jesus, the "Son of man" (of Dn 7:13-14) must be "lifted up," an expression which, in Jesus' language (Aramaic—it doesn't work in Hebrew or Greek), means both "to exalt" and "to crucify." Thus Jesus is "glorified" on the cross; it is there that his nature as God's love is revealed (Jn 3:13-16). This completes Jesus' journey, from his glory at the Father's side (Jn 17:5) to his self-emptying (Phil 2:6-7; Isa 53:10-12), to his glorification on the cross and return to the Father (Jn 12:23-33; 13:1-5, 31-32). As part of his Last Will and Testament, Jesus gives us a "new commandment" which he also acts out in the foot-washing: that we love one another as slaves or servants of each other, "until the end," Jn 13:1.