

## Fifth Sunday in Easter

Humor makes people feel good, but like any other gift, we sometimes abuse it. When I started college, I used sarcasm a lot, trying to be funny. Once when I said something that was probably more hurtful than funny to one friend, another friend challenged me on it. He said, “Sarcasm is not funny. You’re better than that. Don’t use it.” At the time, I thought he was wrong, and I didn’t know how to be funny in a different way. Now I find that the humor people like best is making fun of yourself, not of someone else. I’m still guilty of using the wrong kind of humor in certain situations, so I am not always the best model. But it worries me when I hear engaged couples or married couples use sarcasm or put-downs against each other as a way of being funny. On one hand, it’s a compliment to your partner if you can say something outlandish, and they know you don’t mean it. On the other hand, why not say more often something you do mean and compliment your partner to strengthen the relationship positively? Why not laugh a little more at yourself? The same temptation to put someone down occurs within groups. We sometimes have our strongest arguments with people who are our tightest allies. We sometimes complain the loudest about people with whom we hold high values: other members of the family, neighbors on our block, other Americans, other Catholics. Infighting is usually not helpful, and it can obscure the many values that people hold in common.

After Jesus died, his disciples had to develop their community. It did not all go smoothly. We can tell, for example, from the epistles of St. John that the first Christians did not all get along with one other. That sheds light on the passage we hear from the gospel of John today. It takes place in the Upper Room after the Last Supper when Judas has left and just before Jesus predicts the denial by Peter. Jesus gives a lengthy instruction, a final discourse, to his disciples. We’ll hear from it next week too. Offering his last advice to his followers, Jesus issues a new commandment. Throughout his ministry, Jesus spoke about love many times. He named it to much admiration in the two greatest commandments, and to much astonishment in the command to love enemies. At the end of his ministry, he adds a new commandment: Not love God. Not love your neighbor. Not love yourself. Not love your enemies. Rather, looking at his best friends enclosed with him in the room, he said, “Love one another.” He addressed the other commandments to the crowds, but this one he addressed more privately to one group. He’s saying, “You guys, you guys right here. You are to love one another.” He foresaw that there would be infighting, and he wanted his followers to forsake it. This is how people first find out that we follow Christ: not by the way we love our enemies, but by the way we love the people in our own group.

Bishop Johnston has declared a holy year of renewal for our diocese that will culminate in January. The theme is straightforward: “One Family, Restored in Christ, Equipped for Mission.” One way we can strengthen our “one family” this year is to evaluate how we love the people in our own groups. What kind of humor do we use with them? What tone do we use to exchange words? How do we talk about some members of the Church? When we have disagreements, let us remind ourselves of the new commandment. Jesus foresaw we would not always get along, but he did give us a way forward: Love one another.

Sunday, May 19, 2019