

5th Sunday of Easter “C”, May 18th, 2025.

“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God”,

“I am making everything new.”

The first reading: Acts 14:21-27: “They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. **“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,”** they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” (Acts 14:21-27. New International Version).

Acts chapter 13 was a turning point in the history of Christianity. Today the Roman Catholic Church is universal, meaning that our worship and the celebration of the sacraments are basically the same worldwide, Italy, Spain, North Carolina, Billings, Nigeria, Wolf Point, or in Mexico, these remain the same way. Has it been that way from the Earliest Christians? No! Jesus was born and raised a Jew. The apostles were Jews, and practiced Judaism. At what point in the life of the Church did she become universal?

Several factors prompted the apostles to leave Jewish territory and preach the gospel elsewhere. These include:

1. The direct intervention of the Holy Spirit; “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” (Acts 13: 2-3. New International Version).
2. Persecution and hostility: The apostles, who were primarily Jewish, experienced hostility and were sometimes even arrested or imprisoned for their faith.
3. Intolerance of the Christian faith among Jewish authorities.

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As a result of these and other factors, many Jewish Christians were forced to leave Jerusalem and spread across the Roman Empire, thereby contributing to the expansion and growth of the Christian faith beyond its original Jewish context.

Today's first reading mentions the names of the places (Gentile nations) where the good news of Jesus was heard: Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga, Attalia, and Antioch in Syria. Thus, we have the growth of Christianity beyond its original Jewish context.

The Apostles, Paul and Barnabas, knew the dangers they faced, yet they believed they had a duty to encourage the new believers to remain strong in their faith in Christ. No matter how inconvenient or uncomfortable the task may seem, we must always support new believers who need our help and encouragement. In his speech, St Paul urges Christians to brace themselves for the sufferings and tribulations that come with being a Christian. ***"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."*** Far from being signs of God's disapproval, earthly afflictions open the way to heavenly glory. (Matt 5:10; Rom 8:17).

It was not convenient for Jesus to die on the cross for us! Paul and Barnabas visibly demonstrated that life in Christ does not mean freedom from pain, from suffering, or from persecution. Our freedom comes internally – freedom from sin, from addictions, from the slavery of our own dangerous beliefs. The apostles Paul and Barnabas remind us today to persevere in times of hardship.

They revisited and appointed elders in each church. Part of the reason the apostles, Paul, and Barnabas risked their lives to return to these cities was to organize the church's leadership. They were not just following up on a loosely knit group; they were helping the believers get organized (***administration***) with spiritual leaders who could guide them in their growth. The Greek word used here means "to stretch forth hands," pointing to the rite of priestly ordination. The installation of elders provides guidance and stability to missionary communities while Paul continued his travel. Churches, parishes, and communities grow under Spirit-led leaders, both laypersons and pastors. Let us pray for and support our leaders, and if God puts his finger on you, humbly accept the responsibility of a leadership role in your community.

The second reading: "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" He who

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was seated on the throne said, ***“I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*** (Revelation 21:1-5, New International Version).

Gospel of John 13:31-33, 34-35: “When Judas was gone, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.’”

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:31-33, 34-35. New International Version).

To love others was not a new command, but to love others as much as Christ loves others was revolutionary. Now we are called to love others based on the love of Jesus, who demonstrated sacrificial love for us. Such love will draw unbelievers to Christ; it will also strengthen and unite believers in a world hostile to God. Jesus was a living example of God’s love, as we are to be living examples of Jesus’ love. Jesus also says that our Christ-like love will show that we are indeed His disciples.

What is love? Love is more than warm feelings, it is an attitude that reveals itself in action. How can we love others as Jesus loves us? By helping when it is not convenient, by giving when it hurts, by devoting our time to others’ welfare rather than our own, by volunteering to serve the community/fellowship. This type of love is hard to do. That is why people notice when you do it, and they know a supernatural source empowers you.

Faith, hope, and love are called theological or supernatural virtues because they are “gifts directly given by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life” (CCC 1813). Faith, hope, and love are the foundation of a relationship with God. Without these, we may not be capable of relating to God and living out the other virtues.

To our graduating seniors, may God continue to mold you, and fill us with faith, hope, and love.

Madeleine Prill, Maddie Tracy, Izabeel Martinez, Halle Anderson, and Izabeel DelZotto.

Bailee Roesch, Montana Thomas, Daniel Apostol, Evan Miller, and Ethan Miller.

Ava Yates, Broady Stathos, Brock Wilkins, Zachary Glossip, and Breanna Sandoval.

Many of you seniors here have been involved since your younger age through high school in our parish.

Some of your ministries St Pius X included:

- Children's Ministry: teachers' aides.
- VBS Youth leaders.
- Active in youth group.
- Some of you helped serve during Coffee & Rolls (plus, Evan Miller was the weekend coordinator this year).
- Greeters.
- Eucharistic Ministers.
- Altar servers.
- St Pius X Annual Picnic, many of you helped set up, serve, and clean up.
- Also during the St Pius X Annual Picnic many of you helped with children's games.
- Many of you have helped to serve and to clean up for Giving Thanks Dinner.
- Many of you have helped Parish Life with handing out gifts to parishioners after Masses.

Am sure there are many other areas you have helped St Pius X to Grow, to celebrate and Pray.

Thank you for the gift of your active presence here at St Pius X. Thank you for being good role models to your younger ones in faith, and in social life. Thank you for being dynamic disciples of Christ, both at school and at home. We appreciate you all and wish you well in your future endeavors. Be sure of our continued prayers for you as you take the next steps of your lives.

We need faith, hope, and love to be capable of relating to God and witnessing Jesus Christ. None of the three virtues exists independently of the other. Dear seniors, we pray for you today, we pray for the grace to continue to open up to God to mold you, and fill us with faith, hope, and love, Amen. May you continue to soar like to eagle. Make good use of the opportunities life offers you, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

God bless you.

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