

The Fifth Sunday of Easter May 15, 2022

When Europeans first landed in the Americas, Christians were quick to send missionaries to preach the gospel to the native peoples.

One of the courageous men to take up this challenge was Isaac Jogues. He was a Jesuit priest from France who made the long journey to Quebec, Canada which was being colonized by the French. From there, he made his way along the great lakes region which borders modern day Canada and the United States.

Many of the native peoples, however, were suspicious of his motives. One day, he was taken prisoner, tortured, and kept as a slave for over a year by the Iroquois. The native peoples had planned to burn him to death when some Dutch settlers rescued him and got him on a boat back to France. The settlers were shocked at how inhumanely he had been treated. His hands had been so horribly mutilated that several of his fingers were bitten and burned off.

When he returned to France, he was treated like a hero. The pope considered him a living martyr and gave him permission to celebrate Mass with his mangled hands. It would have been easy for Isaac Jogues to continue living a comfortable life in France, enjoying the admiration of so many important people. But his heart was back in the New World. Despite all the tortures and the cruel treatment, he suffered, he still wanted to bring the native peoples the good news of Jesus Christ.

So, he returned to Canada and asked to be sent back to the Iroquois to continue his missionary work with them. Many people tried to discourage him, but he was determined.

The Fifth Sunday of Easter May 15, 2022

But, when he arrived at the Iroquois camp, sickness broke out and their crops began to fail. The native people blamed it on Fr Jogues whom they said was a sorcerer. So, he was captured again, beaten, and then decapitated.

Because of his heroic faith and the courage, he showed in facing death, he was canonized a saint in 1930, along with several other missionaries who had been put to death in North America.

What would drive a man like Isaac Jogues to endure so much pain and suffering? What would inspire him to go back to the people who had treated him so cruelly? The only answer is that he was full of the love of Jesus Christ. Only that can explain why he was so determined to serve the native peoples, even at the cost of his life.

Today's gospel takes place during the Last Supper. The first words of the reading tell us that "Judas had left them..." He was on his way to conspire with the religious authorities to hand Jesus over to the Romans to be executed. We cannot underestimate how much Judas' betrayal hurt Jesus. Jesus loved Judas and brought him into His inner circle of apostles. He entrusted Judas with all their money and depended on him. Jesus took Judas' betrayal to heart.

He knew what Judas was up to but did nothing to stop him. He could have called Judas out in front of the other apostles. He could have let Judas know that He knew what was going on. But He didn't. Why? Because Jesus loved Judas and respected his freedom. Jesus did not want to condemn or even embarrass Judas. He just wanted Judas to love Him back. But there

The Fifth Sunday of Easter May 15, 2022

must have been a point when Jesus realized that Judas was not going to change his mind.

St Paul tells us in the Letter to the Romans: "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom 5: 7-8)

When Jesus says that He is about to be glorified, this is what He means. When He is lifted up on the cross, the love of God will be made visible. We understand just how much God loves us by looking at the cross. Jesus was willing to suffer to save us. He could have saved Himself with a great show of power. He could have punished everyone who had a hand in His death. But that is not what He did. Rather, He forgave those who killed Him. And because of that love, the cross is now the means of salvation for all sinners.

If we embrace that love - if we accept the mercy and forgiveness that Jesus offers us through the cross - then we have to show that same love, mercy, and forgiveness to others.

Once we understand this, then we can understand why so many men and women down through the centuries found the courage to sacrifice themselves to help others. It was because the love of Jesus was in their hearts. When we welcome the love of Jesus into our hearts, then we do great things as well.

The Fifth Sunday of Easter May 15, 2022

Jesus commands us to love one another AS HE LOVED US. And the way He loved us was by dying for us while we were still sinners. That means that, if we are to love with the same love of Jesus, we must love everyone without distinction. We must love those who hate us. We must love those who insult us. We must love those who hurt us.

To love like Jesus means that we make ourselves vulnerable to others. It means that we might get taken advantage of. It means that we might get rejected and made fun of. It means that we might not be appreciated for what we do. But we do it anyway, because that is how much Jesus loves us.

It is not only the cross that teaches us about this great love of Jesus. It is also the Eucharist. At this altar, Jesus will make Himself small so that He can give Himself to us. If we call ourselves His disciples, then we must make ourselves small to give ourselves in service to others, even when it entails inconvenience and pain. Then the love of God made visible in Jesus Christ can spread out from this church to heal and renew our hurting world.