

Homily – Jn. 13: 31-35
5th Sunday of Easter – 14th / 15th May 2022

In 1921, Lewis Lawes became the warden at Sing Sing Prison in New York state. No prison was tougher than Sing Sing during that time. But when Warden Lawes retired some 20 years later, that prison had become a humanitarian institution. Those who studied the system said, ‘the credit for the change belonged to Lawes’. But when he was asked about the transformation, this’s what he said: “I owe it all to my wonderful wife, Catherine, who is buried outside the prison walls.”

Well, Catherine Lawes was a young mother with three small children when her husband became the warden at Sing Sing. Everybody warned her from the beginning that she should never set foot inside the prison walls, but that didn’t stop Catherine! When the first prison basketball game was held, she went in with her three beautiful kids, and joined the inmates to watch it. Her attitude was: “My husband and I are going to take care of these men, and I believe they will take care of me! I don’t have to worry.” She insisted on getting acquainted with them and their records. She discovered that one convicted murderer was blind and so she paid him a visit. Holding his hand in hers she said, “Do you read Braille?” “What’s Braille?” he asked. Then she taught him how to

read. Years later he would weep in love for her. Later, Catherine found a deaf-mute in prison. She went to school to learn how to use sign language. Many said that Catherine Lawes was the body of Jesus that came alive again in Sing Sing from 1921 to 1937. Then, she was killed in a car accident.

The next morning Lewis Lawes didn't come to work, so the acting warden took his place. It seemed almost instantly that the prison knew something was wrong. The following day, Catherine's body was resting in a casket in her home, three-quarters of a mile from the prison. As the acting warden took his early morning walk, he was shocked to see a large crowd of the toughest, hardest-looking criminals gathered like a herd of animals at the main gate. He came closer and noted 'tears of grief and sadness'. He knew how much they loved Catherine. He turned and faced the men and said, "All right, men, you can go. Just be sure and check in tonight!" Then he opened the gate and a parade of criminals walked, without a guard, the three-quarters of a mile to stand in line to pay their final respects to Catherine Lawes. — And every one of them checked back in. Every one! They had learned the commandment of love as practiced by Catherine.

Well, the Gospel passage of today gives us the secret of Christian renewal as the faithful practice of Jesus' new commandment: "*Love one another as I have loved you*". Jesus has added a new element to the Old Testament command of love by telling us that the true test of discipleship is to love other people in the same way that He has loved us. Hence, the renewal of Christian life means a radical change of vision and a reordering of our priorities in life. Such a renewal brings us to embrace new attitudes, new values, and new standards of relating to God, to other people and, indeed, to our whole environment.

According to a legend, the apostle John lived to a very venerable old age on the island of Patmos. In his later years when he became old, John used to be carried to the assembled Churches, and everywhere he used to repeat these same words to the people: "My little children, love one another". One of his disciples, exasperated, wearied by the unending and constant repetition, asked John: "Teacher, when will you give us a new teaching?" And to which John is said to have replied, "Once you have mastered this one. "Because," he said, "it is the Lord's commandment, and if this only be fulfilled, it is enough."

One day, as Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her Missionaries of Charity were tending to the poorest of

the poor on the streets of Calcutta, they happened to come across a man lying in the gutter, very near to his death. He was filthy, dressed in little more than a rag and flies swarmed around his body. Immediately, Mother Teresa embraced him, spoke to him softly and began to pick out the maggots that were nesting in his flesh. A passer-by was repulsed by the sight of the man and exclaimed to Mother Teresa, “I wouldn’t do that for a million dollars.” Her response was immediate, “Neither would I!” –

Obviously, monetary gain did not motivate the diminutive woman known as the Saint of Calcutta, the Saint of the gutters; but love did. In her writings, Mother Teresa frequently affirmed the motivating power of love. And she said, “we must grow in love, and to do this we must go on loving and loving and giving and giving until it hurts – the way Jesus did.” The greatest disease in the world today, said Mother Teresa, is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for.

Well, dear Brothers and Sisters, we are asked to love as Jesus loved, in the ordinary course of our lives. This means that we should love others by allowing ourselves to be moved with compassion for them. And this is how the world will know that we are the Disciples of Christ. May we be able to live up to our call. God bless you all, **Amen.**

