

04/24/16 5 Easter C

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain...

-- Who among us wouldn't relish this promise in the Book of Revelation? God gives us a vision of a new Jerusalem. He's not talking about the piece of ground I stood on only a number of days ago. He's speaking of a state of peace and goodness in the whole world.

-- But we know this doesn't come easily. St. Paul put it in these words in our first reading: *It is necessary to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.*

-- And St. Paul knew those hardships well. Just before this time, he'd been involved in bitter rivalries, faced opposition and had even endured an attempt to stone him to death by his opponents.

-- We all have had our share of hardships to endure. Some of them have been of our own making, particularly bad, even sinful, choices we've made in life. Others have been due to circumstances beyond our control.

-- When those hardships weigh so heavily upon us, how can we trust in God's promise of a new heaven and earth, where life's pains will no longer be around?

-- In short, we can trust in the promise because of Jesus himself. Jesus is not just a wise teacher. He is the very embodiment of God the Father's love for us. He proved that by his life, death and resurrection.

-- Jesus' love for us is not just a "generic" type of love or a general care for all of creation. It is very personal. In the words of Mother Teresa, soon to be canonized a saint, Jesus **thirsts** for us. He longs for our loving response to his personal love.

-- That "thirst" is how we can understand the "last will and testament" that he gives to his disciples (and to us) in the gospel. Remember, this is on the night before his death.

-- He gives them a new commandment: love one another. Now, that hardly sounds new. You can hear that in the Old Testament scriptures several times.

-- But he continues: **As** I have loved you, so you should love one another. Those two little letters make all the difference. And how does Jesus love us?

-- He loves us unconditionally.... He loves **you** unconditionally. It doesn't matter what you've done in the past. He thirsts for you.

-- But Jesus doesn't simply love us and leave us where we are. He leads us to his way of life and out of sinful ways. He leads us to understand what it means to love unconditionally with an authentic love, not what passes for love in so many contemporary circles.

-- My prayer is that you and I will be open to the love of Jesus who thirsts for us, and that we will walk his way of unconditional love as God would have us do.