

ZE07050429 - 2007-05-04

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-19539?l=english>

Father Cantalamessa on What's New

Pontifical Household Preacher Comments on Sunday's Readings

ROME, MAY 4, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by the Pontifical Household preacher, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, on the readings from this Sunday's liturgy.

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A New Commandment

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 14:20b-26; Revelation 21:1-5a; John 13:31-33a

The word "new" belongs to that restricted number of magic words that always and only evokes positive feelings. "Brand new," "new clothes," "new life," "new year," "new day." The new makes news. They are synonymous. The Gospel is called "good news" precisely because it contains the new -- par excellence.

Why do we like the new so much? It is not only because the new, the unused (a car, for example), generally works better. If this were the only reason, why do we welcome the New Year and a new day with such joy? The deepest reason is that the new, that which is still unknown, inexperienced, leaves more room for expectation, surprise, hope, dreams. And happiness is the child of these. If we were sure that the New Year would bring exactly the same things as the past year, no more and no less, we would not be very pleased about it.

The new is not opposed to the "ancient" but to the "old." "Antique," "antiquity," "antique dealer," are positive terms. What is the difference? The old is that which with the passing of time gets worse and loses its value; an antique is that which gets better and acquires value with the passing of time. That is why today Italian-speaking theologians try to avoid the expression "Vecchio Testamento" ("Old Testament") and prefer to speak of the "Antico Testamento" ("Ancient Testament").

Now, with these premises, let us draw near to the word of the Gospel. A question arises immediately: Why is a commandment that was already known in the Old Testament (cf. Leviticus 19:18) called "new"? Here the distinction between "ancient" and "old" proves useful. In this case "new" is not opposed to "ancient," but to "old."

The same Evangelist, John, writes in another place: "Dear ones, I do not propose to you a new commandment, but an ancient one. ... Nevertheless it is a new commandment about which I write to you" (1 John 2:7-8). Is it a new commandment or an ancient one? Both.

Literally speaking, it is an ancient one because it was promulgated some time ago; but according to the Spirit it is new, because only in Christ is the strength to put it into practice also given. As I said, new is not opposed here to the ancient but to the old. The commandment to love one's neighbor "as yourself" had become an old commandment, that is, weak and worn, on account of its being transgressed since the law imposed the

obligation to love but did not give the strength to do so.

For this, grace is necessary. And in fact it was not when Jesus formulated the commandment of love during his life that it became a new commandment but when, dying on the cross and giving us the Holy Spirit, he makes us able to love each other by infusing in us the love he has for everyone.

Jesus' commandment is new in an active and dynamic sense, because it "renews," makes new, transforms everything. "And this love renews us, rendering us new persons, heirs of the New Testament, singers of a new song" (St. Augustine). If love could speak, it could make the words that God speaks in today's second reading its own: "Behold, I make all things new."

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