

# A Letter from Fr. Jerry Gunderson

May 25, 2025

“What’s new?” a sibling asked. I don’t particularly like that question. The reason is that I don’t usually have an answer on the tip of my tongue. As a Christian, I should.

“What’s new?” For five weeks I have been talking about Easter, about faith, about the conclave, about a new Pope. On this sixth Sunday of Easter, is there anything new that can be said?

New means it did not exist before. It refers to something discovered recently. New requires noticing subtle shifts or appearances in our life. Habit inhibits new possibilities. The marketing folks label their products “New” and “Improved.” One wonders if there has been any change.

The Jews who clung to old ways harassed Paul bitterly. As bitterly as he had harassed Christians before his conversion. Increasing receptivity to Paul’s preaching among Gentiles was matched by increased hostility and rejection by some Jews. They even tried to stone Paul as they had stoned Stephen the first martyr. Nothing new about these persecutions of the “new” way.

The Acts of the Apostles reports a return visit by Paul to communities he had previously helped to establish. Despite suffering repeated harassment, Paul returned to these communities. Realizing that the seeds he planted were sprouting, and despite having been treated harshly by some Jews, Paul went back to nurture the Church. What’s reported as new is the appointment of elders for the people in each community. Recently in Chicago, more than a dozen deacons and two priests have been ordained to nurture your faith and mine. That’s new!

In the Book of Revelation John reports seeing a “new heaven and a new earth,” God dwelling with the human race wiping away tears. The reality was that Christians were dying. But John and his audience are told “no more death or mourning, wailing or pain.” Followers of Jesus are told to be confident. Though we may experience suffering and death, these experiences are all passing away. What will endure is God’s presence with the people to whom he is wedded through Baptism.

We often talk about Baptism as if it was a past event. I got baptized. If we would instead say “I am Baptized,” it would be a whole new way of thinking about our baptism. Not as a past event, but rather as something new to be lived each day. The 18 students who celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation with Bishop Sullivan last Sunday are expressing that they ARE baptized and plan to live their Baptism in a new way!

Love one another; what’s so new about that? Everyone knows that Jesus first commandment is love for God and for one another. But too often we are like Judas. We betray the love God has shown us. When we do, the world can seem void of God’s love. We must fill the gap. Anthony came to me a few weeks ago. All during lent he had been saving money in a little bank. Anthony handed me the bank. He wanted it to go to those poor people in Africa suffering because of the draught, lacking clean water. Anthony’s love was filling the gap left by Jesus departure and return to the father.

God’s love is never in question, but viewed through the prism of today’s readings, we should have a new outlook. God’s eternal plan is to break into time with something new, fresh, and enlivening in every age. This fact represents a widening of our vision more than a change of heart on the part of God. The command to love doesn’t mean that God only recently adopted new standards, but that we disciples are now ready to view the old commandments through a more perfect lens. We are what’s new in the plan of God!