

Homily For Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent - Year I

St Peter's 8:30am Mass- Tuesday, April 9, 2019

Numbers 21: 4-9 ". "

Psalm 102 ". "

John 8: 21-30 ""

Do You Know Who I Am?

Introduction

I never fail to be chuckle at the story about the impatient business man at the airport check-in line who, after being reminded several times that he needs to wait his turn, finally blurts out "Do you know who I am?" To which the agent responds by getting on the microphone and announcing: "There is someone here who does not know who he is. If anyone can identify him, we would appreciate it and I'm sure it would help him calm down. That's funny for two reasons. One is that the annoying and arrogant guy gets put in his place. The other is that it's funny to think he wouldn't know who he was.

Gospel of John

The identity of Jesus is always an issue in the gospels. Unlike the guy at the airport, it is those around Jesus who rarely seem to know who he is. It can seem almost comical that, despite his authority over illness, over the forces of nature, over the demons, and even over death, that 'who he is' is mostly a mystery. It's a mystery, not because he isn't clear, or that his actions don't speak of the father, but because it is just too far a reach for the human psyche, the human mind, the human heart, to make. That's true for those in his day and it's true in ours. The world is still saying, noooooooo, what you believe about this Jesus can't be right. That's stupid. That's ridiculous.

For those of faith, though, the grace of God uses that faith to open eyes to who Jesus is. If we pay close attention to the conversation, we might see where we are stuck in our understanding of Jesus, and where we might need that grace.

"You will search, but you will die in your sins." That means spiritual death- much more serious than the physical death we worry about so much. Could we fast from that worry for a few more days of Lent?

"Where I am going you cannot come." Will he kill himself? (Again about physical death) No, he will voluntarily lay down his life, for us. Could we reflect a bit more on that awesome mystery as we approach Good Friday?

"You are from below and I am from above. You are of this world, I am not of this world." Here we might stop to reflect on the people in the desert. (in **Numbers**) Bored with the food God had provided for them, they complain: we want to be served something better and we want it now. Do you know who we are?

The only way for God to get through to them is to treat them like they are used to being treated by the old gods. Poisonous snakes. Why does it have to be snakes? They worshipped snakes back in Egypt. Now they are being killed by serpents. Today's serpents are numerous. So many things to want. So many shiny objects to hunger for.

Good for the people to realize that it is their sin which is the cause of their suffering. God didn't take away the serpent at that point but gave them an antidote. In a way, he mocks them for their unbelief. Look at the bronze snake on a pole. It's like the woman at the counter putting us in our place. Hearing the words which strike us to the heart, "I have much to say about you and much to condemn."

But we are not devoid of hope. You are stuck in the worries of this world. But, "when you have lifted up the Son of Man (i.e. the antidote to the poison of your sins), you will realize that I am he."

I am he. Who are you? "I declare to the world what I have heard from the one who sent me." I am the one who is the truth which will set you free from your own sins, from your attachments. Later, when Jesus said "I am," the name of God, they tore their clothes and condemned him. But, for now, many came to believe.

Call To Action

If we want to pick one of the three Lenten disciplines to focus on today, based on the readings, fasting would be the key one. Fasting from boredom. Fasting from complaining. Fasting from what we want in favour of the gift of spiritual healing God is offering us. As we look at the one who has been lifted up, let us pray with the psalmist: Hear my prayer Oh, Lord. Hear the groans of the prisoners doomed to die. Let me seek your face, intimacy with you who gave everything for me. Let me grow in humility and perseverance. Let me begin again to see the greatest gift of all, you lifted up on the cross. Let me know who you are so that I might believe and live.