

Homily For Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Easter - Year I

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - April 27, 2021

Acts 11:19-26 "It was there in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians."

Psalm 87:1-7 "All you nations, praise the Lord. "

John 10:22-30 "The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me but you do not believe."

Are We Ready To Listen?

Introduction

Sometimes we should just sit back and be amazed and watch the great story of salvation unfold. Easter season is perfect for this. In Acts, God turns persecution after Stephen's death into conversion of the Gentiles. In John, the mystery of who is Jesus gets a huge exclamation point. In a few minutes, let's see if we can capture a little of that amazement for ourselves.

John

When Jesus was forty days old, Mary and Joseph brought him to the temple as part of the rites of purification for his mother, and to present him to God. There, Simeon and Anna recognized him as the Messiah. When Jesus was twelve years old, Mary and Joseph see him in the temple amazing the elders with his wisdom. When they challenged their son on his behaviour, he said: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" At the time, his parents didn't quite understand. For us, this should really connect the dots. How many times do we hear Jesus say, "the Father and I are one," or to his disciple, "Philip, have I been with you all this time and you do not know that to have seen me IS to have seen the Father."

Forty days old. Twelve years old. Now approaching the pinnacle of his ministry, Jesus is in the Temple and he is being demanded of: Tell us plainly. Are you the Messiah? As is often the case in Sacred Scripture, the apparently unimportant details matter a lot. John tells us that Jesus is walking around the temple during the feast of Dedication of that same temple. That's the winter festival we know of as Hanukkah, celebrating Israel's deliverance from oppression and the cleansing

and rededication of the Temple in 164 BC. Now Jesus is continuing his process of 'cleansing' the temple, not with whips but with his very presence.

Jesus is walking in the Portico of Solomon, the son of David. The Gospels, especially Matthew and Luke, carefully lay out how Jesus is the descendent of the great king David, from whom would come the Messiah. At a deeper level, Jesus is saying that he is a shepherd because David and the kings were considered shepherds of the people. Among many passages about this, the prophet Ezekiel had declared that God himself will be the shepherd of his people.

Is Jesus' answer meant to be confusing? Quite the opposite. The image of the shepherd that Jesus uses for himself is not just an agricultural image to explain how he loves and cares for his followers. He is proclaiming that he is the saviour king, the son of King David, the true shepherd of Israel.

But they were like the accusers of today. They say they want proof they can accept. But what they really want is to destroy what is plain and obvious about God. The works of God are all over the place and it doesn't make any difference for them.

When our son was young, we read bedtime stories. I was kind of tough. If he was antsy and not paying attention, I wouldn't read. The cue for us to carry on was that he would settle down and say: I'm ready to listen. He is 45 now but I can still hear that beautiful seven year old voice say: Dad, I'm ready to listen. And we would have a wonderful bedtime experience.

The disciples were people who saw his works, things that only God could do. They came to believe because of these works. They were ready to listen to the stories he told. They became his sheep. The sheep believe in Jesus because they listen to his voice.

Acts

Another bird's eye view of this great amazing God unfolding his plan of salvation is told in the story of the beginnings of our church. It's one of those rare times when the sequel is even better than the original movie.

Stephen was brutally murdered by an angry mob. Saul used that incident and the hostility it stirred up, to begin an intense persecution. It was so bad, many of the Jerusalem believers were forced to leave town. They literally scattered to other towns and cities, even outside Israel. Can you imagine it?

That was bad. But, as our God does, he brought about an amazing good. Those believers were so persuasive in what they had come to believe about the Messiah that they converted thousands of Gentiles wherever they went. Nowhere was this more powerfully seen than in Antioch, from where Paul would launch his three missionary journeys.

This was a huge moment that we should not lose sight of. Those people joined the flock of the Good Shepherd **without** having seen firsthand the works Jesus did, nor did they hear his voice directly, the stories he told.

Call To Action

Our God is the God who turns death into life. Jesus' death and resurrection got the Apostles fired up about the Messiah. Stephen's death and Saul's conversion got the Gentile world fired up. Barnabas is the symbol of this evangelization. His name means 'Son of Encouragement'. The saints throughout history have done the same down to our time. Now we, in the hearing of the Good News of the Good Shepherd this very day, are the ones to be sons and daughters of encouragement. Without a doubt, the next sequel is about a new time of persecution to also be a time for new sons and daughters of encouragement. The Good Shepherd is alive, still inviting us to hear his voice. Isn't that amazing?

Key Passages

Collect: *O God ...*

Acts: *Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen spoke the word to no one except Jews. But some on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, proclaiming the Lord Jesus and a great number became believers. News of this came to the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch, for he was full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many were brought to the Lord. Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and brought him to Antioch. For an entire year they taught a great many, and it was there that the disciples were first called Christians.*

Psalm: *All you nations, praise the Lord.*

John: *Jesus was walking in the temple and the Jews gathered and said: If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly. Jesus answered: "The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me, but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."*