

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

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

(Memorial - St. Athanasius)

**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."

### Known by the Name of Christ

#### Introduction

Well told stories often include an intense episode, and then a flashback, the part of the story that explains how that event came to be. If they do too much back and forth, we can get confused trying to follow the story. I remember when my brothers and I were first allowed to watch police shows and other mysteries. My dad would come into the living room in the middle of a show, after helping with the dishes. He loved to try and figure out what had happened and what was going to happen and who was the criminal. Both were a great annoyance to us who just wanted to watch rather than answer his questions about what was going on.

We are getting a lot of pieces of the story. It is always good for us to keep the events and people straight in our minds. That's why we have the Scriptures we do. That's why we are encouraged to study and reflect on the great story of the one true God and his plan to share his blessed life with us, saving us from a life without purpose.

Today we have Jesus, of course. John, the storyteller, makes subtle reference to Israel before the coming of the Messiah. Then, during Easter, we have the events of the Church after the resurrection. Then we have the saints, like Athanasius, who continue the story. Finally, there is us gathered here on this day and this time. We are not watching a show. It's the ultimate true story, and we are in it.

Today, I will see if I can put some of the pieces of the story together in order from the different sources. Likely you know most of these things, but sometimes it is good to see the whole picture.

## John

St. John the Apostle gave us the fourth Gospel. What an amazing story teller. But we have to understand how he drops in little details that are important, but easy to miss. He tells us that Jesus was walking around the temple area called the Portico of Solomon, during the Feast of Dedication. Why do those things matter? David was the greatest king of Israel. He was called "a man after God's own heart." But Jesus IS God's heart, revealed to the world in fullness. Jesus is the ultimate king, who is about to bring about a new kind of kingdom, of love. King Solomon, David's son, built the first temple for worship of God. His wisdom was great, but now Jesus walks around that part of the temple named after him. Jesus IS the wisdom of God, made known to the world. Finally, this was during the Feast of the Dedication, also known as Hanukah. That was nowhere near the most important Jewish feast, and should not be compared to the importance of Christmas. However, it did remind people of a time when the temple had been cleansed and rededicated after it had been desecrated and abused during the latter part of the Greek empire. But now we have Jesus, who is the new temple of God, who was pure, was desecrated on the cross, but who was raised to a new life, cleansed of the sin he bore on his body for our sake.

Now we enter into the story. They ask him: "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly", and Jesus answers: "I told you and you do not believe." I told you I am inaugurating a new kingdom and you did not believe. I showed you the heart of God and you did not believe. I showed you the works of God and you did not believe. I told you that I am one with the Father and you did not believe. I told you that the new temple of God is among you and you did not believe. I told you that I am the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. If you believe this, you will be one with me and with my Father in heaven.

## **Acts**

Then Jesus was betrayed, tortured and executed because of lack of belief. But he was raised from the dead, appeared to his disciples, and ascended to heaven. Then many believed, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus, now reigning in heaven.

The Apostles preached. Then Stephen was murdered for his preaching. A man named Saul stood by and approved the murder. Then a strange thing happened. The murder of Stephen, just like the murder of Jesus, did not satisfy the anger and jealousy. Instead, it stirred that anger to a fever pitch. Saul was on a rampage to persecute those early believers. Then he met Christ and had the most dramatic conversion in history. Then he was persecuted for preaching Christ and was back home in Tarsus licking his wounds.

Meanwhile, the persecution grew in Jerusalem, so badly that many had to leave. So God did what God always does in the face of opposition to his plan. He made his plan grow through that opposition. From Jerusalem, they scattered everywhere, bring the good news of the arrival of the kingdom of God. Antioch became the second great centre of this faith. The first Gentile conversion happened through Peter. But now he was directing the first Gentile mission to the rest of the world through the Antioch Church. We call ourselves Christians. Those pagans began that practice, because these people talked incessantly about this Christ, God's Son, the Jewish Messiah, now the saviour of the whole world.

They heard about Antioch in Jerusalem and sent Barnabas to make sure the faith there was legitimate. Barnabas goes there and rejoices. But they desperately needed teachers for the fast growing faith, so he went to Tarsus to get his friend Paul to help out. They preach in Antioch for a year before Paul starts his missionary journeys to the ends of the earth.

## **St. Athanasius**

Three hundred years later, people are still opposing Christ himself. Even within the Church at that point, up to two thirds of the bishops of the church were of the opinion of a man named Arius, who taught that Jesus was not God. But then God raised up St. Athanasius, from Alexandria, in Egypt, where the Gospel writer Mark had established the Church.

For 46 years, Athanasius tirelessly and courageously devoted most of his life to defeating the Arian heresy, which denied the divinity of Christ. When the majority of his fellow bishops were Arian heretics, which threatened the integrity of the whole Church, Athanasius stood firmly and almost single-handedly against their error using his philosophical knowledge, theological wisdom, rhetorical skill, and strength of spirit, despite suffering persecutions St. Athanasius is known as one of the greatest champions of Catholic doctrine to have ever lived, earning the title, "Father of Orthodoxy."

### **Call To Conversion**

Now we come to our participation in the story. There is no more time, but I ask myself today whether people will call me a Christian, not because I am a member of St. Peter's parish, but because I believe the story and ask humbly that Jesus allow me to be one of his flock.

## **Key Passages**

**Entrance Antiphon:** *In the midst of the Church, he opened his mouth and the Lord filled him with the spirit of wisdom and understanding and clothed him in a robe of glory.*

**Collect:** *Almighty God, who raised up the Bishop Saint Athanasius as a champion of your Son's divinity, grant that we may never cease to grow in knowledge and love of you.*

**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."*