

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

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - April 23, 2024

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."

To Listen Or Not To Listen

Introduction

Shakespeare's Hamlet begins a soliloquy with the famous words: To be or not to be. That is the question. In the play, the meaning is a question of whether it is better to live or to die. I think Shakespeare got that right because it is the same question or statement Jesus makes in today's passage from the Good News: To listen to his voice or not to listen to his voice. To believe or not to believe. That is the question. And the answer to that question is still a matter of life or death.

Repetition can be annoying. If someone asks us to do something a second time we might answer: Yeah, I heard you the first time. As disciples of Christ, we know that we have to hear the same message from our Lord repeated not just twice but many times. Well, maybe you don't need to hear it but I certainly do, because I forget even the most important things. It was the pagans who called the early disciples at Antioch Christians, because they kept hearing repeated over and over again about this Jesus who is the Christ.

But when Jesus himself repeats something, it means that this is very important and you I had better listen. Sometimes it is a comforting repetition and sometimes it is a disturbing repetition, as in today's passage.

John

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 and you did not believe. If you do believe this, you will be one with me and with my Father in heaven.

Then he tells those who demand of him to know: You are not one of my sheep because you do not believe. The question we might ask is whether they do not belong to Jesus because they have been arbitrarily excluded? OR, is it because they do not listen to his voice?

Saint Thomas Aquinas comments on this passage of the Gospel by saying: "I can see thanks to the sunlight, but if I close my eyes, I cannot see. This is not the fault of the sun, but mine." We might say the same about hearing. Those demanding an answer from Jesus were like the accusers of today. They say they want proof of God that they can accept. But the works of God are all over the place and it doesn't make any difference for them. What they really want is to destroy what is plain and obvious about God and about the Messiah.

Acts

It's what happened at the beginning of the Church. 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 trying to figure it all out, which he did with the help of a man named Barnabas.

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, bringing the good news of the arrival of the kingdom of God. Antioch became the second great centre of this faith.

We call ourselves Christians. The pagans in Antioch began that practice, because these people talked incessantly about this Christ, God's Son, the Jewish Messiah, now the saviour of the whole world.

Those believers were so persuasive in what they had come to believe about the Messiah that they converted thousands of Gentiles wherever they went. Those people joined the flock of the Good Shepherd **without** having seen firsthand the works Jesus did, nor did they hear his voice directly.

Call To Conversion

The Good Shepherd is alive today, still inviting us to hear his voice. Isn't that amazing? Now we are invited to believe. We did not see the works that Jesus did but we certainly know about them. His enemies today still demand proof, proof which they do not accept even when they hear it or see it.

Like the question of who do you say that I am, today God asks us again: "Will you listen to the Son's voice?" That's what he said to the people at the Jordan River when Jesus came up out of the water after John baptized him: Listen to him. That's what Mary said to the servants at Cana when they ran out of wine: Listen to him. Do whatever he tells you. Over and over again, the message comes to us to listen. That's what it takes to be part of the flock of the Good Shepherd. To listen or not to listen. Life or death. The choice is here with us again at this moment.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Let us rejoice and be glad, and give glory to God, for the Lord our God reigns.*

Collect: *Almighty God, grant that, celebrating these mysteries of the Lord's resurrection, we may merit to receive the joy of our redemption.*

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: "I have told you and you do not believe. 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. I give them eternal life and they will never perish. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."*