

Homily for April 21st 2022

Thursday, Easter Week

Today's Gospel quotes our Lord Jesus Christ saying the following to the Apostles:

These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.

This theme of fulfillment is a very important one in Luke's Gospel. Indeed at the very beginning of the Gospel Luke explains his reason for writing when he states:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us,

Here Luke is referring to other writers who had also written Gospel accounts. Listen to how he describes these works as "narratives of the things that have been accomplished among us." To accomplish something is to bring it to completion. To fulfill something means the same thing. Therefore both at the beginning and the end of his Gospel St. Luke wants us to know that with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ God has fulfilled and accomplished his purposes clearly foretold throughout the Old Testament.

Luke says that Jesus, when gathered with the eleven in the Upper Room opened their minds to understand the scriptures. And what was it he wanted them to understand?

One of the foremost New Testament Scholars, N.T. Wright, states succinctly what Jesus wanted them to understand. "Because Jesus is risen, he is demonstrated to be Israel's Messiah: because he is Israel's Messiah, he is the true Lord of the world and will summon it to allegiance."

The outworking of this dual theme, that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and the true Lord of the world is what the Acts of the Apostles is all about. In today's reading from chapter 3 we hear Peter express both of these principle ideas.

That Jesus is Israel's Messiah is announced when Peter says to the leaders who were complicit with the crucifixion of Jesus:

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him.

Jesus is the true servant, a designation the Old Testament uses as one of the titles to describe the Messiah. By reference as well to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to the "God of our ancestors" Peter is also underscoring that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's Covenant Plan that unfolds over 43 Old Testament Books.

Peter also states explicitly that Jesus is the true Lord of the World by referring to him as the author of life. Then there is this most important verse. Peter calls his hearers to repentance “so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets”

Do you hear the coming together of the dual theme? Jesus is the Messiah who will remain in heaven until the universal restoration, speaks of his Messiah-ship and Lordship.

It was this understanding of Jesus grounded in his Resurrection from the dead that inspired the Apostles to respond to Jesus’ call to be witnesses.

For two thousand plus years the Church has continued to fulfill this fundamental vocation. By our presence here today we are in our own declaring Jesus is Messiah and Lord.

When this is the governing truth of our lives we can pray confidently today’s collect:

O God, who have united the many nations in confessing your name, grant that those reborn in the font of Baptism may be one in the faith in their hearts and the homage of their deeds.

That unity of faith is expressed when we declare that Jesus is Messiah and Lord and is a faith that then finds expression in deeds done purposefully and meaningfully. This is possible because Jesus’ Resurrection orientates our lives and gives them a purpose and meaning that allows us to declare with David in today’s psalm:

What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them. Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.

What dignity and purpose is ours when we can stand with St. Peter and the Christian Witness and proclaim Jesus is Risen Alleluia and is therefore Messiah and Lord!