

Acts 14:19–28
 Psalm 145:10–13b, 21
 John 14:27–31a

Homily for Tuesday Fifth Week of Easter

During the Last Supper discourse in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks honestly to his friends about the reality of being his disciples. We could speak of the twofold dimension of this reality: an intimate union with Jesus as he and the Father are one and the persecution they will experience because they are in union with God.

Jesus says we will share in the union that exists between the Father and him. As he returns to heaven he and the Father will share in this union that will then be extended to Jesus' disciples and I more complete way. The Lord says something that is a first perplexing:

'I am going away, and I am coming to you.'

His ascension will be his going away but it is then that he will come to the disciples in the person of "another advocate". The Holy Spirit will teach the disciples all things, as he leads them into all truth.

The first dimension of being his disciples is the promised presence of the Holy Spirit so they can share in communion with God.

The second dimension is how his followers will share in persecution because of the presence of the evil one:

I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming.

It is significant that Jesus speaks about him as the ruler of this world. He has dominion and his realm of influence is pervasive. Jesus wants his followers to know of the inherent danger and persecution that will arise due to faithfully preaching and giving testimony to Jesus. And yet Jesus says:

He has no power over me

It is within this twofold dimension of union with God and conflict with the enemy that Jesus speaks about peace.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

The gift of peace that Jesus brings is not one as the world sees it, that is, based on the absences of conflict or struggle. It is the gift of knowing Jesus is with the disciples just as the Father was with him in the midst of persecution and suffering. It is the gift that dispels the fear of doing the will of the Father in the face of any danger.

In the reading from Acts we see exhibited the very thing Jesus is teaching here in John.

Amazingly, St. Paul returned to the city and to the people that tried to kill him. Being stoned and dragged out of the city, left for dead, was not enough to disturb the gift of peace that Jesus gave to his apostle to the Gentiles. In the Scripture we often see a link between the depth of one's relationship with God and the peace with which one endures illness, suffering, and persecution.

The gift of peace was accompanied by the gift of community. St. Paul arises after the disciples gathered around him. There is a danger of isolation in times of illness, suffering and persecution often leading to discouragement. The encouragement of community reminds us of the new and necessary relationships we have with each other have been forged in and through Christ Jesus. It is no wonder then that St. Paul was passionate about forming communities and sustaining them when there were threats to its unity in Christ.

Do we wait until a time of illness, suffering, or persecution to deepen our relationship with Jesus? What time and energy do we give our relationship with Jesus and to one another? We can take comfort that even if we become busy with many things, these times of anxiety can become new encounters with God in which our troubled hearts give way to peace even in midst of the hardships undergone to enter the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' gift of peace and the encouragement of the Christian community are essential for us to undergo the hardships to enter the Kingdom of God. Let us not hesitate to ask for the help we need.