

Homily for Friday of Easter Week

April 26, 2019

People of the Resurrection

In today's lesson from Acts chapter four St Luke gives us a vivid picture of what it means to live in light of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we pick up the story of Peter and John, we read what happens to them after they healed the paralyzed man at the Beautiful Gate of the Jerusalem Temple. They are now under arrest and awaiting a temple court hearing at the hands of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Court made up of 71 men, presided over by the High Priest.

So, what do we learn from Luke about what it means to be People of the Resurrection?

1. We will face opposition as we witness to the Resurrection. Luke tells us in verse 1:

1 And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

The Sadducees were the Jewish ruling class who were wealthy men who controlled the Jerusalem Temple and were therefore happy with the Status Quo. They didn't want to rock the boat and they surely didn't want anyone else to rock their boat. All this talk about the Resurrection of Jesus unsettled and annoyed them because they didn't believe in the Resurrection of the Dead. They thought when you are dead, that is it. Lights out, you are done! From that day to this there are always people who will stand in opposition to this central claim of the Christian Faith.

2. There will also be those who respond positively to this teaching. So, St. Luke tells us:

But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.¹

Remember how on the Day of Pentecost 2000 people were cut to the heart and became believers. Now another 5000 are added to their number. We can never compromise to message of the Resurrection in order to make it more palatable to modern ears. Some have tried to do this by explaining away what happened on Easter morning. But to do so is to empty the Gospel of its power and to prevent people from responding positively to the message of hope that is at the heart of Easter.

3. To be people of the Resurrection means that we are in aligned with the power of God that is pure and unadulterated goodness.

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (Ac 4:4). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

This is the only power in the world that can counter the malevolent power of evil. Peter when responding to the question: “By what power or by what name did you do this?” explains:

“Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, 10 be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well.

Notice the reference to evil in Peter’s response, “Jesus whom you crucified”. The crucifixion of Christ was the most extreme act of evil the world has ever seen because it was an action that killed God. Yet this malevolent act was no match for God’s benevolent act whereby God raised Jesus from the dead. We need to always keep in mind that while in this world the power of evil is very strong and often seems the dominant power, there is a greater power still, the power of God in Christ.

4. Lastly to be people of the Resurrection means that we understand Jesus continues to be present and works through his body the Church.

Peter in quoting psalm 118, a psalm that envisions the rejection of the Messiah, states:

11 This is the stone, which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner.

Peter is now stating this psalm verse has found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ who is the cornerstone of the new and living temple, the Church. In his first Epistle, St. Peter speaks of our relationship to Jesus the living stone this way:

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and ⁵ like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house,²

It is therefore our great privilege and responsibility to recall that the only reason the Church came into being is because the Resurrection declares Jesus is the corner stone of the living building not made of bricks but of those who are people of the Resurrection.

It is though the Church that we are shaped into people of the Resurrection whose witness will cause some to be annoyed, like the Sadducees, others who will respond positively, like the 5000, where we can counter the malevolent work of evil by the benevolent power of God as we daily declare:

“for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (1 Pe 2:4–5). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.