

Acts 22:30, 23:6–11  
 Psalm 16:1–2a, 5, 7–11  
 John 17:20–26

Homily for Thursday of the Seventh Week Easter

Throughout the Gospel of John Jesus refers to the world. The world is that dimension of our experience that is opposed to Jesus and his mission. However it is this same world that is the singular focus of his mission.

If this love for the world was the mission of Jesus it is to be the Mission of the Church as well. How do we carry out such a mission in our own day? We are to ask for courage, we are to remember that it is intended for all people and it is to be carried out through the Church.

Courage comes from the Latin “heart”. The heart in this sense refers to that which is most important to our inner self. Throughout the Acts of the Apostles we have been reading story after story where the courage of the Apostles is on display. What inspired them to live courageously? It was of course their encounter with the risen Jesus. This changed them from the inside out. This finds particular expression in the life of St. Paul, who because of what happened to him on the road to Damascus was from then on a changed man. His courage was harnessed to an intellect and a drive that saw him travel throughout the Roman Empire. Today’s story sees him back in Jerusalem where he strategically focuses on the Resurrection of Jesus because he knows that it will cause dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees. This will allow him to witness with conviction to the risen Lord. In the reading from Acts the Lord says to Paul:

***“Keep up your courage!”***

For us this kind of courage is rooted in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Because of who we know him to be and because of the hope we share in the Resurrection of the dead we can live in a world indifferent or hostile to Jesus hearing him say to us: “Keep up your courage”

Not only is our mission one that is inspired by a courage in the Resurrection, it is a mission that is intended to reach all people. Acts begins in Jerusalem, the centre of Judaism, and by the time we get to chapter 28 Paul is in Rome. By its very structure St. Luke wants his readers to know that the Gospel is intended for the Jew in Jerusalem and the Gentile in Rome. These two designations represent all people and is captured in our Acts reading when the Lord says to Paul:

***“For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome.”***

Paul in his speech to the People of Athens, in an earlier chapter of Acts, tells us why the scope of this mission is for everyone when he declares:

***God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead.”***

Jesus' Resurrection indicates that Jesus is the one who will judge all people and therefore he is important to everyone regardless of their race, region or religion.

The Mission requires courage, is universal and is to be carried out in and through the Church. This comes through clearly in the reading from John in Jesus' prayer to the Father.

*As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

The Church's Mission is an extension of the unity that exists between Jesus and the Father. Just as in his Mission Jesus was perfectly joined to the Father so to in our Mission we are to embody the kind of unity that can be an authentic witness to the world. Through our unity centred in faith, hope and charity we are to be one under the Lordship of Jesus as we are joined to the visible Church.

Such is our understanding of how the Lord has ordered the Church. The unity of our Catholic Witness is always in the service of Mission. It was hard enough for the world to believe when Jesus who was perfectly united to the Father was himself present in this world. How much harder for the world to believe if the Church is divided. Our unity is essential to our witness. A witness that is to love the world, so often indifferent or even hostile to Jesus. But a world that Jesus loves and is intent on reaching with his gift of eternal life.

We have a part to play in this mission where a courage rooted in the Resurrection allows us to affirm that this mission is to reach out to all people and is to be exercised through the visible church. A Church whose unity is contingent on the world taking notice and perhaps becoming to believe.