

*Homily for May 1<sup>st</sup> 2018  
Tuesday of 5<sup>th</sup> Week of Easter*

Theodor was an artist of sorts. He drew cartoons for a living, but he wasn't getting anywhere. So, he decided to try his hand at writing and illustrating children's books. After twenty-seven rejections of his book, "A Story No One Can Beat," he was ready to give up. On his way home to burn his manuscript, Theodor ran into an old schoolmate who had just been hired as a children's book editor at Vanguard Press. He suggested that Theodor change his title. The name of his book became, "To think it Began on Mulberry Street." Fortunately it finally made it to press.

Thus began the career of the best-selling children's author of all time, Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss. In addition to winning the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1984, he was also awarded eight honorary degrees. When Dr. Seuss died at the age of 87, his books had sold more than 200 million copies. What made the difference was a kind suggestion and little encouragement from an old friend.

Encouragement is a wonderful word. It means *to strengthen the heart* so that we would persevere in the face of challenges. In today's reading from Acts we have encouragement from an old friend. Think of the situation Paul was facing. In yesterday's reading the people of Lystra were celebrating the presence of Paul and Barnabas because through them Jesus had healed a cripple. As a result, St. Luke records these words, read at yesterday's Mass:

*Barnabas, they called Zeus, and Paul, because he was the chief speaker, they called Hermes.  
<sup>13</sup> And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of the city, brought oxen and garlands to  
the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the people.*

In this same town of Lystra we read how quickly admiration turned to animosity as St. Luke writes:

*<sup>19</sup> But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowds. Then they stoned  
Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.*

Wow, what a change. Us humans are so fickle but notice that this turn of events didn't unsettle the Apostle. Instead Paul and Barnabas go on to Derbe and finally back to Antioch where we are told in Acts 11.26 the following:

*and when Barnabas had found Saul, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met  
with the Church and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the disciples were for  
the first time called Christians.*

This quote is from Acts 11. Antioch was a centre for the early Christian community. Some months later Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch and as we read in today's passage:

*There they strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the  
faith, saying, "It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God."*

Now think about this. Barnabas and Paul had experienced adulation and animosity from the same people in Lystra. Paul had been so badly injured by stoning, that he was thought to be dead. And here he is back in Antioch encouraging the Christians of that city by giving to them a purpose and a perspective.

The purpose is described when he strengthens the souls and the disciples to continue in the faith. How easy it would have been for them to give up, to be discouraged. Here is the thing about the Acts of the Apostles. It is permeated with confidence in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. So great was Paul's confidence in the Resurrection that over in 1 Corinthians 15.58 he says these words:

***Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.***

Now when ever you read a "therefore" in Paul you need to ask yourself what is it there for? The first 57 verse of 1 Corinthians 15 are all about the Resurrection. Then here in the last verse of the chapter he gets to the point. When we believe in the Resurrection of Jesus our souls are strengthened so we can remain steadfast in the Lord because whatever our labour, it is not in vain. Paul so deeply believed this that he was undeterred in the face of great opposition. What gives purpose to our lives is the confidence we have in the Resurrection.

This in turn allows us to have the perspective to understand that it is through many persecutions that we will enter the kingdom of heaven. So often when we face difficulties because of our faith we can wonder, what am I doing wrong? You might not be doing anything wrong. The Resurrection is the greatest news the world has ever heard, but it is the news the devil most wants to silence and will do whatever he can to achieve that end.

May we this evening hear some encouragement from our old friend, St. Paul and remember that because of the Resurrection we have a purpose and perspective allowing us to know that in the Lord our labour is not in vain.