

The Law of Gradualness

Homily for May 25, 2022

In today's Gospel we hear the Lord declare to the Apostles that the Holy Spirit will lead them into the fullness of truth. This is something that the third person of the Trinity will do gradually. Think about the context when Jesus is speaking these words, it is at the Lord's Supper, Holy Thursday evening. Soon the Apostles will, with the exception of St. John, desert the Lord by Peter denying him and the ten go into hiding. And yet it is to these men Jesus promises they will come to a fuller realization of who he is and his work in their lives.

I mentioned a minute ago that the Holy Spirit would gradually be at work in the Apostles lives and the same thing is true with us. There is something in the church called the Law of Gradualness. According to the Law of Gradualness, we grow in knowing the Lord and virtue step by step, not all at once.

We see this at play in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles. Here is St Paul in the City of Athens, the heart of Greek philosophy and he goes to the centre of philosophical discussion, the Areopagus. ("the hill of Ares"). Some of those who want to hear Paul are stoic philosophers, and other epicurean practitioners. The epicureans thought that what is most important in life is to enjoy these years with as many pleasures as we can experience because soon it will be over. They were all for pampering themselves and were doubtful that the gods existed. The stoics, on the other hand, thought that life is a battle and we have to engage in a battle of the will against those forces of darkness. They were pantheists who believed the whole world was imbued with divinity. Both groups are present when Paul insists that God does exist, to counter the epicureans, and that the creator is distinct from his creation, to address the stoics as he declares Jesus and the Resurrection. Interestingly, the people claim that Paul is a babbler and talking senselessly about some foreign deity. But this attracts them because the people in Athens loved discussing novel ideas.

What we see with St. Paul is a man who had been led by the Holy Spirit into the fullness of truth and now he proclaims with conviction that this Jesus is the one by whom God

has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.¹

Here St. Paul is declaring that he is no babbler but the one proclaiming that in Jesus all people will be judged and that it is the Resurrection that validates this claim. This was something St Paul himself came to realize as he moved from being a violent opponent of Jesus to one of his most ardent defenders. Notice what St. Luke describes as the response to Paul:

When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." ³³ At that point Paul left them. ³⁴ But some of them joined him and

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#) (Ac 17:30–31). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

There is a diverse reaction: some scoffed and dismissed St Paul, and others said “we want to hear more about this Jesus and the Resurrection”. A handful believed that Paul was no babbler but making much sense. One tradition believes that Dionysius, a leading intellectual of Athens became the first Bishop of this Greek City.

What we learn from today’s text are two applications about the Law of Gradualness. We are to proclaim with clarity and integrity the Good News of Jesus and the Resurrection, affirming that there is one God who is the Lord of history. In response to the Gospel there will be those who reject it outright, others who will want to hear more but are not ready to commit to Jesus and then others who will on hearing be persuaded to turn to Jesus and be led by the Holy Spirit into the fullness of truth.

May we be so directed by the Holy Spirit that we too are gradually coming to discover of full richness of the Gospel and so declare with St Paul:

The God who made the world and everything in it gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ‘In him we live and move and have our being²

² [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition](#) (Ac 17:28). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.