

Homily For Friday of the Second Week of Easter - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - April 12, 2024

Acts 5:34-42 "If it is from God, you may even be found fighting against God."

Psalm 27:1-14 "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?"

John 6:1-15 "Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed to those who were seated."

With Or Against God

Introduction

The Lord is risen, as he said, alleluia. He is risen indeed, alleluia, alleluia.

We say that Easter is 50 days as a way of indicating it has greater significance than the 40 days of Lent. In fact the 40 days is intended to lead us into the 50 days. I find, when explaining that we are supposed to celebrate the resurrection for that long, it starts to get difficult to feel as if we are in feasting mode for that long. It's not really natural to keep partying that long, even though what happened at that first Easter morning is certainly worth that kind of celebration. And, we say that every Sunday, the first day of the week, is another Easter, another day of celebrating the resurrection.

Forty days is also too long to stay constantly in penitential mode. And fifty days is too long to be constantly in celebration mode. It is more human to have the ups and downs that life brings us. If this is true, what our experience tells us, is it that our Catholic religion is asking us to do something that is not natural?

If we think of it only as 40 days of misery followed by 50 days of happiness, that might be true. But there is a greater purpose for these periods. Forty means that we have an extended period where every day we think again about what we need to let go of that is holding us back from a holy life lived for God, for love. It's forty new opportunities, not one forty day opportunity. And fifty days is so that we get a new opportunity every day to reflect on what new life we want to put back into the places where we let go of our pride and our jealousy and the rest.

Acts

When we look at the apostles in the first Christian community, it can feel like we aren't keeping up to them, who had that kind of joy. First, they preached Jesus every day, almost without ceasing. No breaks. No letdown. Just overflowing with the realization that everything they could not understand about Jesus teaching before the resurrection, now made sense, and so they could not stop talking about it. Then they were arrested for that constant preaching. Then they heard the Sanhedrin talking about killing them. Then they were flogged. Then they were released and told to stop preaching or they would be back in prison.

So, what did they do? After that treatment, they went out full of joy and kept right on preaching. That's amazing and, 2000 years later, we ordinary Christians would find it hard to have that kind of zeal and that kind of joy and that kind of passion.

But that is not the point. The point actually comes from a leading Pharisee. He told the Sanhedrin to leave the Christians alone. If there movement is not from God, it will die out like all the other fake Messiah movements. But if it is from God, you had better not oppose it because you will find yourself fighting against God. This was such a wise statement that it convinced everyone to follow the advice.

Here is a question? Was Gamaliel defending the apostles against condemnation because he believed Jesus was indeed God's Messiah? Probably he saw what happened when they killed Jesus and it only made the movement grow. Probably, he thought that they should not make that same mistake again but rather should let the thing die out on its own.

How do we know this? Well, that name, Gamaliel, is very significant in the story. One of his students is much more famous than he. We find out later that Saul of Tarsus was just following Gamaliel's school of teaching when he was rounding up Christians to try to stop the movement. He approved of the stoning of Stephen. He didn't say, let's just let the movement die out on its own. He figured that they would have to stamp it out. But the Lord Jesus intervened in his life and he

became, along with Peter, the most important early teacher of the faith. He ended up suffering many floggings because of the joy of knowing that he himself had been redeemed, bought with a price as he himself later said. Gamaliel was right, not because he believed, but because God was in charge.

John

Today, the Gospel reminds us of a miracle in front of five thousand men when “Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted.” This miracle was not so Jesus could show off, but as a sign of God’s love for those people.

As this very important Chapter 6 of John's Gospel is read for the next week or so, we will hear Jesus compare this bread and fish he multiplied, to the manna that God provided in the desert. Then he will explain that the manna which came from God to sustain his people in the desert was a sign of the true bread from heaven which had now come down from heaven to sustain his people for eternal life, not just the temporary life we live now.

As the chapter continues, Jesus tells them you have to actually physically eat this bread if you want that new life. That's the Eucharist, the ultimate sign of God's Real presence while we are still here on earth. When we eat this bread, we express our belief in him as the true bread come down from heaven.

Call To Conversion

Brothers and sisters, it looks today as if this movement of redemption is in trouble. But God is still in charge. Just as Gamaliel predicted, if it is for our own doing, for our own success, that we act, we will fail, no matter who the leaders of the Church are, and no matter who the principalities and powers of the world are, and no matter what they do to us. Those forces fighting against the Church, from without and even from within, are fighting against God. But God will not let the Church be overcome. The Apostles message is true, and we need to teach the truth of that message so that we are cooperating with God. That is why we have 50 days, and every Sunday throughout the year. Every day we are invited, asked,

called to think again about the greatness of God, and about his redeeming love for us.

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