

Homily For Tuesday of the Second Week of Easter - Year I

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - April 12, 2021

Acts 4:32-37 "With great power, the Apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord."

Psalm 93:1-5 "He has established the world ... Your decrees are very sure."

John 3:7-15 "If you do not believe me about earthly things, how can you believe about heavenly things."

Faith and Friendship

Introduction

Last week, a friend died. He wasn't the healthiest guy, but there was certainly no indication his life was at risk. David's obituary made sure to mention that it was 'non covid' related. I guess that will be the question everyone asks from now on. Our friendship was based initially on our shared Christian faith. It allowed us to talk about things that most people don't. I am left thinking about the ways I was a good friend but also the ways I failed as a friend.

One Heart and Soul

These readings the Church gives us from the Acts of the Apostles encourage us to reflect on a certain kind of friendship as the basis for Christian community. No doubt, it involves the faith lesson Jesus works very hard to get into the heart and soul of Nicodemus. But we also have to ask what makes us look like a resurrection people.

How are we to live an Easter spirituality such that those who look at us will want to know what we believe? Before the resurrection, on the road to Jerusalem, the disciples argued about who was the greatest of them. Now, post resurrection, it says that they are of "one mind and heart." The Apostles and, indeed, the whole community, powerfully bears witness to Christ. But Jesus himself had talked to them of how, as they draw closer to God in faith, they will also be drawn into a profound friendship with him and with the Father.

Today's first reading introduces us to Barnabas, who will have a very close friendship with St. Paul on his evangelizing travels. He shows his submission to the authority of Christ invested in the Apostles by placing his money at their feet. In turn, they give him a new name, Barnabas, which means 'son of encouragement'.

His name signifies that his mission is a deep and abiding friendship based in Christ.

I believe that what we are seeing in the first Christian community in Jerusalem is a glimpse of heaven. It's not a utopia, which is a human idea of a perfect society, but one that can't actually exist. No, it's an actual foreshadowing of that perfect existence. It's not heaven yet but a pretty good indication of what that will be like.

They were of one heart and soul. ONE is the key word there. We know that we all have a unique individual heart and soul. Yet, if we are to be truly united, it has to be as one heart and soul. So, which heart and soul makes us one? Of course, it is the heart and soul of Jesus Christ, who is *one* with the Father, and who comes to us in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Everyone gave up their own possessions and laid them at the feet of the Apostles. What are possessions and who are the Apostles? Christian teaching understands having possessions as stewardship. Everything comes from God. We are the caretakers, not the owners, of what we possess. That first community is still a model for us of a very good understanding of this principle. The Apostles had the full authority of Christ. To lay ones possessions at their feet was to give them back to Christ who gave them in the first place.

But we are still dealing with broken humanity, even then. The very next chapter of Acts introduces discordant notes. However, unlike human invented utopias, that thread of authentic Christian community is still our model and our hope. It is still what can draw us to a deep desire for the eternal heavenly community. That is why we have a profound hunger to be connected. Today's philosophy of isolation from each other is a severe threat. We are isolated out of fear, directly opposed to the assurance that, in Christ, there is no fear.

Believing Jesus

The conversation Jesus has with Nicodemus gives us further insight into the heavenly existence. Nicodemus goes to Jesus because he believes there is something to the idea that Jesus is a teacher from God. But Jesus very quickly raises the stakes of their conversation.

Heaven is where it's at, Nicodemus. And, to get there, you need to look up from ordinary human experience to the action of the Holy Spirit. It's like the wind. You can't see it, but you know it's there. The Spirit is like that. But Nicodemus asks: "How can these things be?"

Jesus expects a lot of a man who is a teacher of the law and a leader among the Jews. Nicodemus should have understood this, for he knows that the spirit or breath given by God is responsible for natural life, and that in messianic times God would sprinkle clean water on people and give them a new spirit. In both Hebrew and Greek, the same word means both wind and spirit. It's frustrating for Jesus that this teacher of the law has trouble with that comparison.

Call To Action

Being united to Christ and to one another in Christ requires those two things. One is to feel the wind of the Spirit blowing through our souls. The other is to seek friendship with Christ and allow it to blow through us to the rest of the world. People will be attracted by that kind of friendship. It will encourage others to lay down their lives at the feet of Christ. That's the heaven we seek.

Key Passages

Collect: Enable us, we pray, almighty God, to proclaim the power of the risen Lord.

Acts: The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and everything they owned was held in common. With great power the Apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them ... A Levite, Joseph, to whom the Apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'), sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the Apostles' feet.

Psalm: The Lord is king. He is robed in majesty. He has established the world. It shall never be moved. Your decrees are very sure. Holiness befits your house, O Lord.

John: Jesus said to Nicodemus: "You must be born from above." Nicodemus said: "How can these things be?" Jesus answered: Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand? If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? The one who descended from heaven is the Son of Man. He will be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."