

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 Jesus."

Psalms 93:1-5 "The Lord is king. He is robed in majesty. He has established the world."

John 3:7-15 "No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven."

Look Up

Introduction

In the natural world I have to know where to look. Even just going for a walk can be dangerous if I don't know which direction to look. To avoid falling, I must look down enough to avoid potholes, but I must also look up to avoid walking into traffic or someone else. As is always the case, what is wise behaviour in the natural world gives us clues about the supernatural world. We have to know where to look to avoid evil things which cause us to fall into sin, but also to be able to see the holy things of heaven. Good Friday showed us the worst evil. It demonstrated what happens when the world only looks down and ignores the things of heaven. But heaven itself came to earth at the resurrection, inviting believers to look up at Christ's victory over sin and death.

The psalmist has the right idea, looking up to declare that the Lord is king. He is robed in majesty. One has to spiritually be looking up to see that the Lord is robed in majesty. The Lord is everlasting goodness and mercy. Old and new testament are full of images of going up mountains to be in the presence of God, then bringing that presence down to earth. So looking up is a priority. It's what the early Christian community was doing. It's what Jesus was asking Nicodemus to do.

Acts

The Christian community in Jerusalem had the perfect environment for looking up after the resurrection. The Apostles were there. The hundreds of disciples to whom Jesus had appeared were there. The Holy Spirit powerfully came down

from heaven on the earliest believers. Even those who had called for the crucifixion of Jesus were converted because they saw the heavenly vision.

The miracles which Jesus had been seen to do during his life and ministry, were being done by the Apostles. Now when they looked back down around them from that looking up, what did they see but the needs of those who were poor. With that heavenly vision, it was easy for those who had much to let go of their ownership of worldly goods and put them at the service of the Apostles and of the poor.

This was not a utopia, an ideal society that can sort of be imagined but can't really exist. This was the result of a community looking up to where there is only perfection. This was a community living in the place where heaven and earth are joined and where heavenly priorities bring the best of worldly priorities to perfection.

They had everything in common, but this was not a hippie commune or a political system. It was a vision of heaven. In that vision, the greatest miracle was that the believers laid down worldly possessions everything at the feet of the Apostles and all was shared and all had what they needed. Nobody said, "I gave at the office." No one said, "Why don't the poor just pick themselves up by their own bootstraps." Christian teaching understands having possessions as stewardship. Everything comes from God. We are the caretakers, not the owners, of what we possess. To lay ones possessions at their feet was to give them back to Christ who gave them in the first place.

Before the resurrection, on the road to Jerusalem, the disciples had argued about who was the greatest of them. Now, post resurrection, it says that they are of "one mind and heart."

John

The conversation Jesus has with Nicodemus gives us further insight into the heavenly vision. Jesus expects a lot from Nicodemus, who is a secret admirer. He

is a teacher of Israel but doesn't have the full understanding that comes from looking up into heaven.

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?" It's frustrating for Jesus that this teacher of the law has trouble with that comparison. But Nicodemus, even though the rest of his group was only looking down, he has a heart that wants to believe, that just needs to be shown how to look up. Nicodemus came to Jesus because he could see that God was acting in him and through him. Later, he offered a word in defense of Jesus when he was accused. Still later he helped with the embalming and burial of Jesus. Very gradually, he was being born from above.

Call To Action

The disciples didn't start a community based on certain principles and in memory of Jesus. What happened was Jesus himself. HE IS ALIVE. HE IS RISEN. We can't create this community. We try with the philosophy of accepting everyone's truths. But, that just leaves millions of people isolated. We try to do it with government impositions on a whole people. Instead we have the greatest division and hostility between peoples even within families that has ever existed.

Many people have the right idea. Love one another, be kind, treat people with respect, honour differences rather than ridicule. There is one thing missing. It's belief in God and His animating Spirit. That requires looking up. The more we focus on the victory and Lordship of Christ, the more will our faith be supernatural, including our charity. That's the basic doctrine of our faith. Without it, we are wandering around in the dark. With it, heaven becomes real right here.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to God.*

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

Acts: *The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul. 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, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and laid the proceeds at the Apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need..*

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

John: *Jesus said to Nicodemus: "You must be born from above. The wind blows where it chooses. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." 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 earthy things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. He will be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."*