

Homily for Friday of the Seventh Week of Easter - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - June 3, 2022

(Memorial - St. Charles Lwanga and Companions)

Acts 25:13-21 " *The accusation was about a certain Jesus, who had died, but whom Paul claims is alive.*"

Psalms 103:1-20 "Bless the Lord, you his angels, obedient to his spoken word."

John 21:15-19 "When you grown old, someone will take you where you do not wish to go."

Always Two Kings

Introduction

If you go on pilgrimage to Israel, you will first land in Tel Aviv on the Mediterranean coast. You can then cross SE to Jerusalem, or go north towards Galilee and the many treasures of our faith in Nazareth, Cana, Capernaum, etcetera. If you go that way, you will first come to the ancient city of Caesarea Maritima, which was built by Herod the Great, to honour Caesar Augustus. This is historical. From there, wherever you go, you will be following the path of two kings. One is the king of this world, the Roman emperor. The other is the king of the universe, the king of all eternity. One can see that, at every turn, with every step, there was a choice to make two thousand years ago, but exact same choice exists today. Just as it was then, there is no way to avoid having to choose. Both the king of this world and the king of heaven want your allegiance. The difference is that the first king will gain that allegiance by force, by coercion or by lies, by empty promises, whatever it takes. The second king does it by invitation and by self sacrificial love.

As we come to the end of the Easter season, the Church has also been showing us, through the readings, those two kings. The Sacred Scriptures make clear, over and over again, how the courage and witness of a few have, from the beginning, kept the image of the king of love in a place which cannot be missed. Out of hatred for that king, many have chosen the first king and its kingdom based on idolatry, fear and falseness.

Acts of the Apostles

We come to the end of our journey through the book of the Acts of the Apostles. In two days we tell the story of Pentecost, the coming of the Spirit of Christ with power, and the beginning of the Church. The subject of the Book of Acts is the resurrection and preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit. In Chapter One, Jesus declares, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Today's passage at the end of the Book of Acts shows us how this will happen. They have put Paul on trial for proclaiming the resurrection. THE subject is that Jesus is raised from the dead. It's a worldly trial. Luke provides us with all those names of the Roman leaders, the Jewish leaders, the disciples, the circumstances and the question at issue. The High Priest has travelled 120 kilometers to make the accusation. As always, the Romans don't understand it. They think there is going to be a crime that is being adjudicated, but it always turns out to be some religious argument that doesn't make sense to them. The world never understands the real issue.

As always happens, when matters of faith are brought before secular courts, Christ is sacrificed again. That's all the world has to offer. We don't get it but we will crush it in case it undermines our worship of earthly priorities and earthly kings. It is happening again today in courts everywhere. Life is being sacrificed. The dignity of the human person is being imprisoned.

However, this doesn't happen unless some religious authorities sacrifice their own principles to cooperate with the secular authorities. It happened at Jesus' trial. We have no king but Caesar, they cried. And so, they forced Pilate to crucify the man who had committed no crime and he knew it. It's happening here again with Felix and Festus.

But God's plan for the salvation of the world is never thwarted. God uses those who cooperate with his plan to further it. But he also uses those try to kill that plan to further it. When Paul appeals to Caesar, it's not because he wants to

follow the earthly king. It is because he wants to be able to proclaim Christ risen to that earthly king. And what happens? Paul is taken to Rome, the centre of the world, from where the ends of the earth - the empire - can be reached. It's the centre of all roads. It's the center of all communication. Luke demonstrates to us that what Jesus had proclaimed to be true is about to take place. The Gospel will be proclaimed to all the ends of the earth.

Charles Lwanga and Companions, Ugandan Martyrs

That proclamation continues in Japan and Korea and Viet Nam and Asia and the Americas and Africa, even while it is in trouble in Europe. Today's memorial is for Charles Lwanga and his companions, who are martyred for the faith in the 19th century Uganda. God's plan still inspires people to follow the king of the universe, the king of love. Satan continues to drive hatred by religious and secular authorities to kill those who follow the author of life.

John

Jesus has entered into the true temple and atoning for our sins giving us peace with God. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Now we must be those shepherds, continuing to proclaim the righteous king. Peter will live for that proclamation and he will die for it. Let us do the same.

Call To Action

The world will never love the church. Some think we can get that love if we change our teachings. However, they will only love that we are unfaithful to God. We still have to choose between the world and God. At the end of John's Gospel, Jesus prays that his disciples will be protected while they are in the world. He does that through his Holy Spirit. Let us prepare to receive it with our whole hearts and so proclaim the king we long for.

Key Passages

Acts: *The tribune who had arrested Paul sent him to Caesarea to be tried by Felix the governor. After two years Festus, who succeeded Felix, laid Paul's case before the king, "The chief priests and elders of the Jews have asked for a sentence against this man. I told them it was not the custom of the Romans to hand over anyone before being given an opportunity to meet his accusers face to face and to make a defense. The accusers did not charge him with any of the crimes I was expecting. Instead they had certain points of disagreement about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. I was at a loss how to investigate. When Paul appealed to a decision of his Imperial Majesty, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to the emperor.*

Psalms: *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, he removes our transgressions from us. Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones, obedient to his spoken word.*

John: *Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go (indicating the kind of death by which he would glorify God). After this he said to him, "Follow me."*