

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

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - May 17, 2024

Acts 24:27;25:13-21 "*The accusation is about a certain Jesus, who died, but whom Paul claims is alive.*"

Psalm 103:1-20 "As far as the east is from the west, he removes our transgressions from us."

John 21:15-19 "Peter felt hurt because Jesus said to him the third time: 'Do you love me.'"

Always Two Kings

Introduction

We are now just two days from Pentecost, the great feast of the coming upon the Church of the Holy Spirit. Some call that even 'the birthday of the Church'. So, we are in the last few days of Easter, during which time we have unceasingly celebrated the resurrection. We also are coming to the end of our Scriptural journey through the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, where the big question is always before us, whether Jesus was raised from the dead or not. The question we have today is the question that was before everyone in the first century. St. Thomas Aquinas answers this question. He says: "Faith is a habit of the mind whereby eternal life is begun in us, making the intellect assent to what is non-apparent."

John

The Gospel again affirms that Jesus was raised from the dead and appears to the disciples, eats some fish with them by the sea, then has this intimate conversation with Peter. He asks him three questions, beginning with: "Do you love me more than these?" Someone has asked what he means. More than these what? Does he mean do you love me more than these fish? Silly, right? Do you love me more than the other disciples? Do you love me more than everyone? Peter says yes, but when Jesus asks him the third time, Peter is hurt. Clearly there is a relationship between this threefold affirmation of his love for Jesus, as part of his penance for a threefold denial of Jesus at his trial before he was crucified. So why is Peter hurt? It looks like he still needs some conversion to a full and true repentance.

That's something I think we all need. Our sin requires a constant reaffirmation of our love for Jesus.

Acts of the Apostles

This reaffirmation is evident for Peter and for Paul and for all the others throughout the Book of Acts. Did Christ rise from the dead? What will we do about it? What will we be willing to suffer for it. They have put Paul on trial for proclaiming the resurrection. 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, which is the resurrection.

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 always happens, when matters of faith are brought before secular courts, Christ is sacrificed again. That's all the world has to offer. 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.

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.

Call To Conversion

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. On the eve of the great feast of Pentecost, it is our calling to make way for the Holy Spirit to come into our lives and into the life of the world, with the power from on high. That is how we will testify. No one is outside of this calling. Will my life be short? Then live it with passion for Christ. Will it be a long life? Then make steady gains in your spiritual life. Decide today that you will make room in your heart for the Holy Spirit to reveal the fullness of truth to you, and through you to the world. 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."*