

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

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - May 27, 2022

Acts 18:9-18 "The Lord said to Paul in a vision: Do not be afraid but speak and do not be silent."

Psalms 47:1-7 "Shout to God with loud songs of joy, for the Lord the most high is awesome."

John 16:20-23 "You have pain now but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice."

Do Not Be Silent

Introduction

It was very common when I was a child growing up in the Catholic faith that, if someone asked a question that a parent or a teacher or even a priest, was not able to answer, they would typically say, "It's a mystery. We are not supposed to be able to understand it in this life. We will understand when we are in heaven." However, I think we realize today that it is no longer good enough to say, "It's a mystery. Just remember that Jesus loves you and everything will be fine." It is true that there is mystery. But this mystery has a purpose. It is meant, not to confuse us, but to draw us more deeply into the knowledge of God. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in. The Holy Spirit is the great teacher of mystery. And we are to be students of the mystery of God's redeeming love.

Gospel of John

Poor disciples, I sometimes think. Yes, they were kind of dense at times when it came to Jesus revealing the mystery of God being fulfilled in himself. But, if I am honest, that's me as well. I also think Jesus sometimes spoke to them, not so that they would understand at that present moment, but rather for the future. He was making a place in their hearts for the Holy Spirit to later reveal the truth to them and, through them to the Church, even to this day. For example, how could they possibly understand his words to them in yesterday's Gospel passage: You see me, but then you won't see me. Then you will see me again. Was he suggesting a game of hide and go seek? And then the words of today's passage. You will be sad

but the world will rejoice. You will be in pain like a woman giving birth, but then you will rejoice like a woman who has brought a child into the world.

The women would possibly get his meaning, but what a strange illustration to use for the men. It's certainly not one that I will be using in a teaching any time soon. Jesus can get away with such an example. In a way, this gives us one more clue that Jesus is the one who comes from God and is present for all people, men and women. He knows the depth of all human suffering.

So it should not be a surprise if we are trying to understand Jesus' words with human understanding, we also will be confused. But, if we allow the Holy Spirit to truly work in our minds and hearts, and to look to the teaching of the church, the words of Jesus will make more and more sense throughout our lives.

Evil is also a mystery. How is it possible that the world rejoices at the death of Jesus. The voices of the world love to quote the philosopher Nietzsche: "God is dead." Nietzsche used the phrase to express the idea that the so called Enlightenment had eliminated the possibility of the existence of God. That's a modern worldly hope. We don't need God. We have human reason, they said and they still say. So much for enlightenment thinking. Today there is an updated version of that. We don't need God because we have Artificial Intelligence to make our lives great. So let's kill him again and worship our technology instead.

Here's a question. If the world rejoiced at the death of the man who healed and loved and served and gave his life for the ransom of many, tell me what does that say about the world? And, if the world is trying once again to kill God, have things changed? No, they have not. Neither must his disciples change their approach. God is alive through the Holy Spirit moving in us.

Acts of the Apostles

Paul, the Apostle, was rejected and beaten many times, as were the rest who proclaimed Jesus. Should we expect anything different today? No, we should not. And, in fact, that is what we find. The world is doing everything it can to beat Christ out of Christians, to use science as a weapon to ridicule those who believe

in him, to force us to retreat more and more into our little tiny personal spaces, and even to attack us there through voices from the internet.

I often wonder how Paul knew which places to stop and establish a church, and which places to shake the dust off his sandals and move on. He was opposed everywhere he went, so how to decide when to preach and when to move on. But today's passage from Acts tells us God told him in a vision, the result of his constant prayer: Don't be afraid. And, more important, don't be silent. Find those who are faithful believers. They are there and will support you.

What a great message for us. We can feel alone in the world. That's what the world wants. We need to seek each other out and remind each other of all God has promised and said and done. We need to remind each other of the joy of knowing God. The world cannot take that from us if we stand together. That's the joy of the resurrection which we celebrate with intensity during Easter. That's the joy of the psalmist: Praise God with shouts of joy. There it is again. Don't be silent.

They accused Paul of the same thing they accused Jesus. He is worshipping God but he's not doing it right. Even the pagan Roman leader, Gallio, knows their accusations are false. Pilate said the same thing about Jesus: Why do you want me to crucify him. I find no crime in him.

St Augustine of Canterbury was terrified when he heard about the ferocity of the Anglo-Saxons he was to evangelize. He asked the Pope to release him from the mission. But Pope Gregory encouraged Augustine and sent him back. He set up in Canterbury. His labor among the pagans was slow and difficult, but England eventually became a Christian nation through his efforts.

What Shall We Do

When the world thinks it is finally killing Jesus for good, we are sad and the world rejoices. But the resurrection has taken place once so that it might take place again and again in our hearts. That is what the Holy Spirit does in those who are willing to believe, and to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us.

We shake the dust of the world off of our shoes and we go to those who are ready, who are hungry, who are longing and thirsting for spirit and truth.

Today begins, in the Diocese, a Pentecost novena of days of prayer in preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit who reveals the mystery of God to us. I hope some of you will come to St. Peter's on the Friday evening before Pentecost, to pray in honour of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised it. Let us believe in it. But let us go further and trust in it, even if the world won't.

How did the psalmist know to say: Clap your hands, all you peoples. Shout to God with loud songs of joy. For the Lord the most high is awesome. Sing praises to God, sing praises to God. Sing praises to our king. It's a mystery, alright, but a mystery of joy. Do not be afraid. And, do not be silent.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *You have redeemed us, Lord, by your blood and have made us into a kingdom, priests for our God, alleluia.*

Collect: *Hear our prayers, O Lord, so that what was promised by the sanctifying power of your word may everywhere be accomplished.*

Acts: *At Corinth one night the Lord said to Paul in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent, for I am with you and no one will lay a hand on you, for there are many in this city who are my people." But the Jews made a united attack on Paul before the tribunal. They said, "This man is persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law." Gallio said, "If it were a matter of crime or serious villainy, I would accept the complaint. But since it is a matter of your own law, see to it yourselves. I do not wish to be a judge of these matters." Then all of them seized Sosthenes, the official of the synagogue and beat him. After staying there for a considerable time, Paul said farewell to the believers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila.*

Psalm: *Clap your hands, all you peoples. Shout to God with loud songs of joy. For the Lord the most high is awesome. Sing praises to God, sing praises to God. Sing praises to our king.*

John: *When Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world, he said, "Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice. You will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman is in labour, she has pain. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a child into the world. So you have pain now but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."*