

Homily For Tuesday of the Third Week of Easter - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - April 16, 2024

Acts 7:51-8:1 "He knelt and cried out: Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

Psalm 31:2-7,16,20 "You have redeemed me. Into your hand I commit my spirit. "

John 6:30-35 "I am the true bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry."

A Necessary Saviour

Introduction

In the beginning, God created man and woman in his image and likeness. There was perfect intimacy between them and God. That is symbolized by their nakedness before God. They were like God and they were intimate with him. How could anything be better than that? Yet the Church Fathers claimed that it was a good thing that Adam and Eve destroyed that intimacy by their sin, because it meant that we would get to know the Son of God, the Saviour.

We began the Easter Vigil, the greatest celebration of the year: "O necessary sin of Adam, which gave us so great a redeemer." I cringe a little when I have to sing that line as part of the Exsultet. Really?! It's a great thing that Adam and Eve sinned, so that we would know Jesus? Did we really need that terrible turning away from God, the great disobedience of humanity?

Perhaps they are right. Every good story has an obstacle to overcome before the successful and happy solution. Adam and Eve would always have been capable of sin with the free will they were given. The important thing for you and me today is that we know we have sinned and cannot be restored to health without the Saviour. On our own, we are powerless before the many temptations we face. And so we do need a Saviour, not just once but over and over again.

The Bread of Life

We will always tend to be like those in the crowds that Jesus had just fed from a few small loaves. Right after receiving an amazingly miraculous sign, they wanted

to know: "What sign are you going to give us so that we may see it and believe you?" They wanted more. We always want more, don't we?

So, Jesus makes his attempt to get through to those 'uncircumcised ears': Who do you think fed you in the desert? Moses didn't feed you. God did. And what about what just happened? Were you fed by bread which you already possessed? No, it was I who multiplied your pathetic little offering into a feast to satisfy you fully.

In both cases, you were not saved by the bread you ate. But there is true bread, which comes from heaven. That's the bread you should desire. That will satisfy you in ways you can't imagine and has the power to save you. "Give us that bread," they ask. Where will that kind of bread come from? Again, from the only begotten Son, the true bread from heaven, the Bread of Life itself.

Stephen

In the first deacon, Stephen, we see that 'Bread of Life' visible in his disciples. In him, we see a blueprint for the Church. He is ordained to serve the needy, always a number one concern for God. He does signs and wonders among the people, like Christ himself. He is arrested, given a phony trial before the same Council and High Priest, with similar fake witnesses. The accusations against him are almost identical, blasphemy in the first degree, for speaking against Moses and God, against the temple and the law. Like Jesus, he testifies to the truth about God before them with boldness.

Like Jesus, Stephen's last words are of forgiveness for his murderers. When he says: "Do not hold this sin against them," a great grace comes on the world. We don't win by politics or responding in kind to violence, but by authentic true love which cannot be defeated. That forgiveness will open up a treasury of grace in the life of Saul, who approved of Stephen's killing, but who will be forgiven after he meets Jesus, and will become the church's greatest early evangelist.

After his conversion to Christ, Paul never forgets that he stood by while Stephen witnessed to Christ. Later in Acts, he testifies that his persecution drives him to lay down his life as a witness and to proclaim to thousands on his missionary

journeys, that this is how the Christian lives in testimony to Christ, who is the fulfilment of God's great plan of salvation.

Call To Conversion

The saints frequently remind us that it is not our achievements that further God's plan. It is our continual turning away from our sin and back to God that makes the outpouring of the Spirit into our lives possible. This does not mean we should go out and sin so God can be manifested. It means that our tendency to sin is transformed into our salvation by the power of the Holy Spirit and faith in the saving power of the sacraments of the Church, Christ himself made present.

The rest of the world, both secular and religious, will always be against Christ. They will always seek to kill him, and our faith. Even amongst Catholics, belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is severely challenged. That is why, for those who do believe, we must now be a people who look to heaven and see the Son of Man seated on the throne. Seeing the heavenly reality changes everything. Christ's life and death and resurrection have become necessary as both a sign of obedience to God and a sign of contradiction to the thinking of the world.

Today, let us sing with the psalmist, who sees the reality of God long before Jesus' life. Let us say with all of them, You are my rock and my fortress. I trust in you, Lord. Let your face shine upon your servant. And let us say with the conviction of those who see God, "Into your hand I commit my spirit."

Key Passages

Collect: *O God, who open wide the gates of the heavenly kingdom to those reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, pour out an increase of your grace.*

Acts: *Stephen replied to his accusers, "You stiff necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit ... Your ancestors killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers... Enraged, they ground their teeth at Stephen. But, filled with the Holy Spirit, he said, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God! But they covered their ears, rushed together against him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. And the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died. And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria.*

Psalm: *You are indeed my rock and my fortress. Into your hand I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me. Let your face shine upon your servant. Save me in your steadfast love.*

John: *After Jesus had fed the crowd from the five loaves, the people said, "What sign are you going to give us?" Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven, which comes down and gives life to the world. They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*