

Second Sunday of Easter –

April 30/May 1, 2011

Introduction: (Acts 2,42-47; I Peter 1,3-9; John 20,19-31) In our first reading today, St. Luke gives us a lovely picture of the early Church - how it was like one big happy family where everyone was agreeable with one another and cared about each other. If we read a little further in the Acts of the Apostles, we see this idyllic condition didn't last very long, especially as the Church grew and became more complex. Even if the Church is not as unified as it was then, the basic elements of the community that St. Luke identifies for us still form the Church today. They devoted themselves, St. Luke tells us, (1) to the teachings of the apostles, (2) to the communal life, (3) to the breaking of bread (their term for the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper) and (4) to the prayers. This statement tells us in general that being a member of the Church is more than just a matter of calling ourselves a Catholic or having our name on some Church's roster. Being Catholic involves (1) seeking to grow in our faith, (2) caring about one another, (3) participation in the Eucharist, and (4) taking time to pray. An inactive believer is not a believer at all, or as St. James tells us: "Faith without works is dead." (James 2,17)

Homily: I understand this is a true story from Texas. Drummond's Bar in Mt. Vernon Texas decided to expand their facilities. The local Baptist church, which disapproves of drinking alcohol, started a prayer campaign to prevent the bar from expanding. Construction on the bar progressed up until the week before the grand opening when lightning struck and burned the entire bar to the ground. After the bar burned, the church folks started bragging about "the power of prayer." So the bar owner sued the church on the grounds that the church "was ultimately responsible for the demise of his building, either through direct or indirect action or means." In response to the accusation, the church denied all responsibility to the burning of the building. The judge read through the bar owner's charges and the church's response and commented: "I don't know how I'm going to rule on this, but it appears that we have a bar owner who believes in the power of prayer, and an entire Baptist church congregation that now does not. (from the internet)

Our gospel today touches on a number of themes with faith being one of them. Jesus offers his friends his own special peace. He gives them a commission to continue his work ("as the Father has sent me, so I send you"). As a helper in this ministry, he gives them the Holy Spirit, and one of the works of Jesus they would do would be to forgive sins. This passage gave rise to the designation of this Sunday as Divine Mercy Sunday. God's mercy, however, is not limited to this one Sunday. God is ready to forgive us any time we approach him with true sorrow for our sins. Then we have the memorable story of Thomas who missed Jesus' first appearance and refused to believe in Jesus' resurrection until he had concrete proof. Jesus gave it to him the following week. Finally, Jesus proclaims all of us blessed who have not experienced what Thomas and the others experienced: "blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

What I have chosen to talk about for the rest of this homily may seem to some people as being a strange topic; however, I am sure most of us have at times wished we could see our Lord as

Thomas and the others did; maybe even have a conversation with him. We envision this would greatly enhance our faith. I had often thought that if Jesus appeared to more people, maybe more people would believe in him.

A few weeks ago I was reading the book *The Science of the Cross* by Saint Edith Stein, a Jewish nun who was killed in a concentration camp. She was a brilliant philosopher, and in her book she was examining the teachings of St. John of the Cross, a doctor of the Church. The book talks about visions under the general treatise on the topic of faith. I am significantly summarizing their thoughts on this, for St. Edith Stein goes on for several pages talking about this matter. She says faith informs us of things we have never seen nor heard. It is a form of supernatural knowledge, knowledge we cannot acquire in any natural way through our senses or through reason. Faith does not contradict reason, but what it communicates to us cannot be acquired by reason. In this life we cannot grasp what God is. It is only through faith (on our part) and grace (on God's part) that we can make progress in knowing God and in growing in union with God. John of the Cross says simply, "the greater one's faith the closer is one's union with God." In considering visions or apparitions, the book goes on to teach that when they come from God, then God will accomplish whatever he wishes to accomplish through them, but we should never dare to desire such sensory apprehensions because such desires do not help us to live by faith. Desiring signs and visions to base our faith on holds us back from growing in faith and prevents the spirit from soaring to the invisible.

Thomas and the other apostles, of course, had to see our risen Lord for it would be their mission to give witness to the resurrection of Christ (something they would have had to see in order to be credible witnesses). And that's what they did. The Greek word for witnesses is ????????? (martyrs). We don't know if Thomas actually touched our Lord, but we hear how Thomas' vision of Jesus took him beyond what the eyes could see to a greater level of faith when he declares: "My Lord and my God." And the gospel ends with the statement that it is blessed to have believed even though we have not seen. And the next to the last chapter of John's gospel ends by telling us that through this faith we have life in his name, a life that will lead us to someday see God face to face in eternal glory.

Third Sunday of Easter - A Cycle

May 8, 2011

Delivered at the 50th Wedding Anniversary Mass at St. Peter in Chains Cathedral.

I am honored to celebrate with you today. I'm Fr. Joe Robinson, pastor of St. Boniface Church. I am also the dean of the Cathedral Deanery and it was because I am dean that I originally thought that's why I was invited to preside at today's liturgy. But the idea did cross my mind that since I have been ordained for 47 years, maybe I was asked to come because I'm about as old as everyone else here. That way you all would feel more comfortable. Maybe with a little luck and God's blessing, I'll make it to my 50th anniversary in a few years. A 50th anniversary is

something worth celebrating and something worth giving thanks for that is what we are doing here today.

I have three little stories you might enjoy (all three are from Reader's Digest: Laughter, the Best Medicine, pgs. 154, 163 & 175):

1) A lady was telling her friend that after she and her husband had a huge argument, they ended up not talking to each other. Finally, on the third day, he asked where one of his shirts was. "Oh," she said, "now you are speaking to me." He was confused and asked: "What are you talking about?" "Haven't you noticed I haven't spoken to you for three days?" she asked. "No," he said. "I just thought we were getting along."

2) A lady and her sister in law were discussing how long they've been married. The sister-in-law commented: "you've been married to my brother for 50 years. That's a long time." "A long, long time" she agreed. Then she smiled and said: "you know the strangest idea occurred to me the other day. If I had killed your brother the first time I felt like it, I'd be out of jail by now."

3) A husband and wife were comparing notes one day. She pointed out to him, "I have a higher IQ, did better on my SAT's and made more money than you." "Yeah," he said. "But when you look at the big picture, I'm still way ahead of you." Puzzled she asked: "How do you figure?" "I married better," he replied.

So, in the name of the Church, in the name of the sacredness of the sacrament of marriage, I thank you for your 50 years of dedication and love for each other. I thank you for doing more than just silently getting along and for not killing one another when you felt like it. I hope today that you each feel deep in your heart that you got the better part of the deal when you got married.

Leonard Pitts, whose editorials appear in the Enquirer, wrote one a week ago that was inspired by the marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton. I am going to steal some of his ideas, ideas that are profound, ideas that will not surprise any of you but are always worth remembering. He said marriage is an act of faith. It is a willingness to make a bet that it's possible to love someone always and forever. As you all know, loving each other always and forever is not just romance. It is as much a function of commitment and work as it is a function of love. The capacity and willingness to make that bet, to put in the required work, to be faithful to a commitment, are slowly disappearing from American life. Fifty years ago 70 percent of all American adults were married. Now it's about 54 percent. As so many marriages end in disaster, for a numerous reasons, marriage in this day and age is an act of hope as well as an act of faith. It is an act of defiance against cynicism and pessimism. St. Paul has given us one of the best descriptions there is of love when he tells us it patient and kind, it is not jealous or snobbish or rude or self-seeking, not prone to anger or holding grudges. There is no limit to its forbearance, its trust, its hope, its power to endure. If people have that kind of love, no wonder Paul can say, "love never fails."

Our gospel today presents us with the picture of Jesus' frightened and frustrated disciples. This wasn't the first time they were frightened or frustrated by our Lord nor was it the last time. The kingdom he came to offer would be much greater than they were capable of imagining. The way into that kingdom would be the cross. Through good times and bad, he never abandoned them even when they deserted him. In our journey through life sometimes things can get pretty discouraging. Things don't always happen the way we think they should and we feel anger, discouragement and sadness. Through good times and bad, our Lord is with us, although we do not always recognize him. He has won victory for us over all those forces that seek to pull us down. He has declared victory even over our ultimate enemy - sin and death. It is that victory that we celebrate especially during this Easter season. All through the year Jesus is with us, teaching us with his word in the Scriptures and nourishing us with the bread of his own flesh and blood as he does today.

Again I congratulate you and thank you for overcoming the challenges and fears and discouragements we all face at times throughout our lives. I congratulate you and thank you for your patience, your many sacrifices, your sensitivity to one another, your care and concern, your enduring love. May you trust in our Lord's presence with you and always experience hope and joy and a love that never fails. Amen.

Sixth Sunday of Easter - A Cycle

May 29, 2011

INTRODUCTION: (Acts, 8,5-8.14-17; I Peter 3,15-18; John 14,15-21)

St. Luke's Acts of the Apostles tells us how the message of Christ spread throughout the Mediterranean world, starting at Jerusalem. The power behind this growth was the Holy Spirit and the risen (yet invisible) presence of our Lord. As the ministry grew, the Apostolic leaders needed more helpers and so last week they chose seven other men who were ordained to serve, men we now call deacons. Initially they helped with the daily distribution of food to the poor and widows, but it wasn't long before they were preaching the gospel of Christ. The first martyr was one of these seven, St. Steven, who spoke with such power that the enemies of Christ could not contradict him but could only destroy him. Another one of the deacons, Philip, was the first to announce the good news of the resurrection of Jesus in Samaria. The Samaritans were hostile to the Jews and vice versa, but the gospel was well received. The Apostles 'confirm' the ministry of Philip with an even greater outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

HOMILY

Some of you may have heard this funny story: it's a letter an old lady wrote to her friend. She said she found a bumper sticker that said: "Honk if you love Jesus." Being very religious she put it on her car. On the way home she stopped at a red light and was lost in thought of how good God is. She didn't know the light had changed, but she was grateful the person behind her loved

Jesus, because if he hadn't honked, she wouldn't have noticed the light changed. As a matter of fact, she discovered a lot of people loved Jesus. Her spirits soared being surrounded by such loving people and so she leaned out the window and waved and smiled at all of them. She even honked her horn to be able to share in all that love. She saw a man waving back with only one finger stuck up in the air. She asked her teen-aged grandson in the back seat of the car what that meant. He said it was a Hawaiian good luck sign. Well she just gave him a good luck sign back. She saw her grandson was laughing so hard, and she knew he must have just been filled with the joy of the Spirit. A couple of people got out of their cars and were walking toward her. They probably wanted to pray with her, but just at that moment she noticed the light had turned green so she waved to all of them and drove on. She was the only car to get through the intersection, because the light turned red again and she was sad to have to leave all those loving people - but she gave them one last wave with the Hawaiian good luck sign and drove on.

Jesus tells us today, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." He says it again at the end of this short passage "Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me." Anyone can put a bumper sticker on their car. Keeping the commandments is far more challenging. Why is this so important to Jesus? It's because when we don't keep his commandments, we negate his work, we make his life and death meaningless. For that was his work, the meaning of his whole life, to teach us, to lead us and guide us. If we say his teaching has no impact on me, I make up my own rules, we're saying his life has no impact on me; and if his life has no impact on me how can we say we love him. It is a contradiction.

The reward for following his commandments, the reward to letting him be truly Lord in our lives is that he will come into us. He will not leave us orphans, he will come to us, he will live in us. It's wonderful how this works, the more we obey him the more we come to love him. The more we love him, the more we desire to do what he wants of us. Love is not measured by what we feel (although it is nice to experience the joy of being near the one we love - and that's what heaven will be forever) but in this world feelings come and go. Love is measured by what we do. It's all so simple.

It's so important too. Jesus spent the last evening with his Apostles at the Last Supper and he poured out his heart to them, trying to remind them of the most important things he tried to teach them before he would be physically gone from them. Even then, he would be with them in spirit, and through his Holy Spirit, would continue leading them to himself and to the Father. The world, the flesh and the devil do their best to lure us further from God, so it's good to have the extra help of the Spirit to lead us rightly. We feel good when we follow his way and we will rejoice forever for having done so. Amen.