

Holy Thursday

April 1, 2015

St. John tells us of Jesus' love for his own. Jesus loved them to the end. John likes to use words that have a double meaning. Here, in the Greek, loving them to the end means loving them to the fullest extent of his divine love and it also means loving them to the end of his life. John then contrasts Jesus' love with Judas who planned to betray Jesus. Judas has no love in his heart for he had chosen to follow the inspiration of Satan. Jesus doesn't reveal Judas' plans to the others at this moment, but he gives his disciples a demonstration of humble service and love by going to each one to wash their feet. I wonder whether Jesus thought his demonstration of love and service would help Judas to change his mind. It is a demonstration we all must learn from and remember. Every year on Holy Thursday we reenact the foot washing. After he was finished, Jesus said: "if I, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet." We should serve one another humbly and lovingly. The message here seems to be quite clear.

There's a great deal more in the foot washing that I want us to reflect on. This deeper meaning comes out in Peter's objection to Jesus washing his feet. Peter didn't understand why Jesus should wash his feet. Jesus said, "what I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later." From the gospels we know that Peter was sometimes pretty dense in understanding what Jesus was saying or doing, but this act of humble service should have been obvious to anyone, even Peter. However, Jesus is saying there's more to it than you know right now. As a matter of fact, the foot washing is so important that without it a disciple loses his heritage with Jesus. The word "heritage" is translated as "inheritance" in the gospel we just heard. Jesus said Peter would lose his inheritance "**with me.**" This is a definite clue that Jesus was talking about eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. And Peter would lose that if Jesus did not wash him. Notice Jesus does not say, "if you are not washed," but he said: "if I do not wash you." The foot washing is more than just an example to be imitated; it is a saving action of Jesus, an action of Jesus that makes it possible for the disciples to have eternal life with Jesus. Understanding this much, Peter now goes to the opposite extreme. He declares, "don't just wash my feet, but my head and my hands as well." Jesus said, "no, Peter, you misunderstand. It's not the number of washings that are important, but it is what the foot washing symbolizes." This is the main point. What does it symbolize? It symbolizes Jesus' humbling himself to death on the cross, something Peter would not understand it until later after the resurrection.

Jesus performed this servile task to prophesy symbolically that he was about to be humiliated in death. Peter's objection, provoked by the foot washing, enabled Jesus to explain the saving necessity of this death; it would establish a person's heritage **with him** and it would cleanse them of sin. "Unless I wash you, you will not have inheritance with me." Jesus is telling us we need to participate in the saving power of his death for us if we hope to share in his eternal life. Unfortunately, not everyone chooses to participate in this saving power. Judas was not changed by the foot washing because

Judas' heart was filled with the evil he was intending; he was not moved by the love Jesus extended toward him.

We participate in his saving death and resurrection through our humble service of one another, through faith and the Scriptures, through the sacraments, especially through the Eucharist, the sacrament which he gave us on the night before he died. We continue on as Jesus told us at the end of tonight's gospel: "As I have done for you, you should also do." Amen.

(Thoughts from The Anchor Bible, the Gospel According to John XIII – XXI, by Ray Brown, pg 564 – 569)

Easter Vigil & Easter

April 4/5, 2015

We just heard the conclusion to the gospel of St. Mark. There is one last verse that was not read which I wish to reflect on. After the angel told the women to tell Jesus' disciples and Peter: Jesus "is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you," Mark concludes with this surprising statement: "Then they (the women) went out and fled from the tomb, seized with trembling and bewilderment. They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." (Mk. 16,8)

Today we are celebrating the day that was and ever will be the most significant day in the history of our world. And that is to say a lot. Our world has seen a lot of changes, some wonderful, such as inventions that changed our ways of doing things and our ways of living; some not so wonderful, such as inventions that could wipe out an entire nation in a few seconds.

Some people might argue that Christmas is the most important day in history, when God's Son came into this world, but God's Son and all he did and taught would have been quickly forgotten without the resurrection. His disciples (who had the responsibility of proclaiming his name and his teachings) were afraid to say they had ever heard of Jesus after he was arrested. The women who followed him even to Calvary were sure his ministry was at an end when they came to put the finishing touches on his burial. The empty tomb and the angel that proclaimed, "he is not here. He has been raised," left them running from the tomb, trembling and bewildered. Mark leaves us bewildered when he ends his gospel by telling us "they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." A later editor or scribe added a few appearances of the risen Lord (borrowed from Luke and John) to the end of Mark's gospel in order for it not to end so abruptly. It was strange the way Mark ended his gospel without telling us about any of the appearances of Jesus as the other three gospels did. Surely Mark knew about the appearance of the risen Lord to his disciples for Mark was writing 30 to 40 years after Jesus died and rose. As soon as the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples 50 days after Easter, the apostles started preaching openly about Jesus' resurrection. And the

earliest actual document we have about the resurrection and Jesus appearing to his followers was written by Paul to the Corinthians about 15 years before Mark was written.

Surely Mark has a purpose in ending his gospel so abruptly. He is telling us it's up to us to spread the good news about Jesus' resurrection.

Indeed the resurrection of Jesus was significant for Jesus and his followers 2000 years ago, but it is also significant for each one of us. Not only did Jesus rise and show us death did not have the last word in his short life, but the resurrection tells us death does not have the last word in any of our lives. God wants us to share in Jesus' resurrection and new life and to be with him forever. God has better plans for us than for us to live out our lives here in this world and then for it all to be ended. Jesus tells us in John 10,10: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." These words keep me going; they keep me full of hope; they keep me full of expectation even when very good friends pass away – and I am experiencing that more and more as I get older. Paul says clearly: "if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." The last words from the angel in today's gospel also say it clearly, "he goes before you."

Is today significant? It is central for everything we do. It is the basis for our hope for heaven; it is the reason I know Christ is in the Eucharist; it is the reason we attend Mass on Sunday; it is the reason why we try to live good lives. Thank you for coming today; thank you for your faith. My prayer is that we always live our lives with resurrection faith. Amen.

Second Sunday of Easter- B Cycle

April 12, 2015

INTRODUCTION: As most of you know, the Acts of the Apostles was written by Luke, the same Luke that wrote the third gospel. Our first reading every Sunday, from now until the end of May, will be from the Acts. Luke tells us today about the early Christian community. It must have been very early in the life of the Church because everyone got along so harmoniously. Later on in the Acts, we find out that it wasn't long until their system of sharing all things in common began to fall apart. Paul's letters tell us about many problems Paul had in dealing with the Churches he founded that caused him great anxiety. But for a short time in the beginning, the early Church was of one mind and one heart.

HOMILY: Our gospel begins on Easter Sunday night. The disciples had learned in early morning that Jesus' body was gone and that he had already appeared to several people. Suddenly Jesus appeared to them. He showed them his wounds so they would know it was really he. So much could be said about this appearance and the second appearance a week later, but what I want to focus on today is that Jesus gave the disciples the power to forgive sins.

This is surely the reason why this Sunday is designated Divine Mercy Sunday. Jesus forgave sins and now his Apostles could do it by his power and in his name. This is exactly what “mercy” means. It means God is reaching out to save us, to lead us by his grace to the kingdom of heaven. I think the notion of mercy is misunderstood by many people today. They think it means God is going to bring everyone into heaven no matter how they lived their life here on earth. Jesus is very clear that there are those who choose not to receive God’s mercy and forgiveness. All we have to do is look at some of Jesus’ parables in Matthew, such as the unforgiving servant, the workers in the vineyard, the parable of the wedding feast, the ten virgins, the parable of the talents, the last judgment.

It’s easy to understand what Jesus meant when he said: “whose sins you forgive are forgiven.” It’s more difficult to understand what he meant by “whose sins you retain are retained.” From what I’ve read, the retaining of sins would refer to the teaching ministry of the Apostles, identifying what is or is not evil, and what will keep a person in spiritual darkness rather than leading them into Christ’s light.

So intent is Jesus on saving all people that he has given to mere human beings a power that belongs only to God. This is mercy in that God wants to share his love with us, but we must accept it. Our relationship with God cannot be one-sided. God has reached out to us in love and we must respond in love. If we choose not to respond, God’s mercy cannot save us for it cannot change us. We thus condemn ourselves. As Jesus said: “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (Jn. 3, 17-18)

A lot of other Christian denominations do not accept the sacrament of reconciliation (aka confession). I think it makes complete sense in that it gives us extra assurance of God’s mercy and forgiveness and, psychologically, it has the positive effect of helping us be relieved of our guilt when we have done wrong. One thing I sometimes run into is that people do not always experience the peace that reconciliation can bring us. They do not feel that peace, not because God hasn’t forgiven them, but because they haven’t forgiven themselves. We all make mistakes, we’re all sinners, that’s what comes with being human. When God forgives us, we have to forgive ourselves and stop beating ourselves up. When we keep beating ourselves up, that’s an unhealthy form of pride at work - telling us we shouldn’t have done the things we did. Humility is to accept ourselves as we are and trying to do better.

There’s one last thing about mercy. St. Teresa of Avila mentions it. When we have experienced God’s mercy and forgiveness, we need to be merciful and forgiving toward someone who has hurt us. Now I’m not talking about being in an abusive relationship which we should get away from if possible; I’m talking about the thoughtless, uncaring, catty comments that may come our way in the course of interacting with one another.

After all, we do pray forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Well, I guess I've said enough about mercy – so I will practice what I preach and have mercy on you and say Amen.

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time: Fr. Joe was on vacation.

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time: Deacon Jerry preached.