

## Tuesday the Second Week of Easter Readings

FIRST READING: Apostles 4:32-37

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the Apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the Apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need. Thus Joseph, also named by the Apostles Barnabas (which is translated "son of encouragement"), a Levite, a Cypriot by birth, sold a piece of property that he owned, then brought the money and put it at the feet of the Apostles.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 93:1ab, 1cd-2, 5

***The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.***

The LORD is king, in splendor robed; robed is the LORD and girt about with strength.

***The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.***

And he has made the world firm, not to be moved. Your throne stands firm from of old; from everlasting you are, O LORD.

***The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.***

Your decrees are worthy of trust indeed: holiness befits your house, O LORD, for length of days.

***The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.***

GOSPEL: John 3:7b-15

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said to him, "How can this happen?" Jesus answered and said to him, "You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this? Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

The Gospel of the Lord.

## Tuesday the Second Week of Easter Reflection

“The community of believers was of one mind and heart.” Every time I read or hear this I have to ask, “For how long?” I have never known the Church or parish, for that matter, to be united. Was it fifteen minutes? My grandfather was disinherited by his family when he converted to Catholicism before he married my grandmother. The Church throughout history has been divided. There have been heresies, apostasy and schism since the early days. There are, according to Google, some 34,000 different denominations today. This division is a scandal with no true means or true desire to unify. In parishes there are many different groups that have troubles getting along. We face resistance and reluctance for neighboring parishes to cooperate or combine.

It is always easy to find difference rather than similarity. It is difficult to work to a common goal. Politics, religion, ethnicity, language and culture can be divisive in society and even families. We speak of race as if there was more than one human race. We are all created in the image and likeness of God. We are all God’s children. Our point of view does not mean that we are right and others wrong. Righteousness is only found in God and not in ourselves. Jesus challenges us to change not become entrenched. All our enemies are beloved of God too. We all seek God. We can seek God even in those we do not like.

Unity is part of the nature of God found in the mystery of the Trinity. The great prayer of Jesus found in the gospel of John during the last supper, “Father may they all be one as we are one,” may be a gift but it is a gift we must seek in our actions not only in our hearts. Divine Savior, St. Eugene, St. Monica and Our Lady, Mother of the Church will become one parish despite our resistance. We have a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic community. The Sox and Cubs are both Chicago teams. The entire human race faces the COVID 19 pandemic. Infection can strike anyone. Anyone infected can pass it on to others. How can we find God in the lives of fellow Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists? How will diverse politicians work to the common good? These have been the challenges that the human race has faced since Adam and Eve. Only by God’s grace can they be healed. Only by God’s action through us can they be resolved. The time of harmony in the early Church was a glimpse of what is possible.

When I was a kid, I was taught by a few nuns. To be exact sisters, for not every religious sister is a nun. Nuns are the equivalent of a monk. Not every religious brother is a monk. Brothers and sisters take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. They are members of a religious order and, by and large, live in community. Nuns and monks take solemn vows and, for the most part, their community is cloistered, that is, closed off from the rest of the world. I was taught by the School Sisters of St. Francis out of Milwaukee, WI. They stressed that there were only Twelve Apostles. Yet, since Judas was a traitor, there was a thirteenth, Matthias. In today’s reading, we have a fourteenth. In Paul’s letters, Paul claims the title for himself. What is an apostle? How is an apostle different from a disciple? A disciple is one who follows a teacher; one who seeks transformation into a believe system and way of life. An apostle is one sent out to continue that system and life through mission elsewhere. Apostle comes from two Greek words apo and stello. Apo means out or away from. Stello means send. Together they mean send out or send away from. An apostle is, what we call, a missionary. That’s the sense of the word used in the first reading. I like to add that we are all apostles. At the end of mass we can say, “the mass is ended,” and, as I like to, add, “Go in peace.” The word mass is only found in English. As far as I

know, in all languages, the word comes from the Latin word missa. Missa comes from the word to send. We are sent out of mass to bring Jesus into the world. In that sense we are all missionaries and apostles.

The passage says that they took care of the needy. Was that only within that community? Was there only one community? Were there others? What was the relationship between the communities? Did they only help their own people? Certainly there were more needy people who weren't believers. How did the Church grow? The Church today, I mean the whole, divided Church, cares for others who are not members too. This is what we call Tradition with a capital T. It has been part of the Church's live experience from its beginning. The gospels themselves speak of Jesus ministry to the poor as well. For example Catholic Charities and Chalice, the charity Fr. Lobianco runs, carry on this ancient mission of the Church today. This is part of what it means to bring Jesus to a waiting world.

The gospel mentions one of the two Irishmen mentioned in the New Testament; Nick O'Deamus. The other is Jesus taught Daily in the temple. Born from above; what can this mean? How do we come to faith and believe? Do we choose to believe? Do we reject belief? What is the role of free will? Faith is a gift from God. We can choose to believe only if God gives us the gift. If we do not believe, God has not graced us with his gift. There's no way that we can give someone else the gift of faith either. Our only role is to give witness to our own faith in what we do and say. Often we think nagging, heaping guilt and shaming people are the best tools to do that. They are not. Those activities witness to our self righteousness and nothing else. The way of Jesus is an invitation offered in love, compassion and mercy. For us to treat others in Jesus' way is most effective. Gospel means Good News. It comes from the word Godspell which comes from the Germanic Gott Spiel or God Speak. Shaming, nagging and guilt betray bad news. Life in Christ is our goal. Life in Christ comes with God's gift of faith.

Jesus told of himself being lifted up. I always try to bring a message that is up-lifting. Usually we mean by up-lifting is something encouraging or something that will lead us heavenward. We think of heaven as being up. The ancient faith of Israel always revered high places as being the realm of God. Mount Sinai was the place where Moses encountered God and where God gave the people the Ten Commandments. The temple of Jerusalem, which Israel considered God's house, was atop a hill. We like to hoist our heroes atop other's shoulders. Here it means that Jesus will be lifted up on the cross to die the death of a criminal. Here Jesus professed his true mission. Since this comes from the gospel of John, it is a subtle hint that can be mistaken for praise. This is also a subtle hint of the resurrection that can only happen because of the Cross. In order to rise, Jesus had to die first. The key to understanding this reference is the serpent Moses lifted up.

When the Hebrew people were wandering in the desert on their journey from bondage in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land, they grew weary of the lack of food and water. I suppose that forty years of that would get to people. They complained. God's response to the constant complaining was to punish his people. God sent seraph serpents to bite, poison and kill his people. Moses showed more mercy than God and pleaded for God to stop the carnage. God then told Moses to make a serpent of bronze, mount it on a pole and carry this among the people and be healed. It did no good for the people who died. The symbol of suffering and

death became the symbol of healing and life. This is how we, as believers in Jesus, view the Cross. The Cross is our symbol of forgiveness and eternal life.

The reference to the serpents is a difficult one. How could a God of love, mercy and compassion do this? How can we reconcile God's vengeance with God's forgiveness? Is God a God of dysfunction where we cannot distinguish the hand that smites from the hand that heals? Right now all of humanity is under threat from COVID 19. Is this the wrath of God too? Here's the rub. In order to be healed, forgiven or shown compassion there has to be a reason for healing, forgiveness and compassion. The fact is, all of us hurt; all of us sin. Believe me, when I stand and move around I can hurt. I also sin. Sometimes we hurt each other. Life is tough sometimes. The title of late the Jim Morrison, of the Doors rock band, is called "No One Here Gets Out Alive." The title is as true for each of us as well. God forgives me when I sin. God heals me when I am in pain. God shows each of us compassion and mercy. We can find God's goodness in the goodness of others. Each of us can be the instrument and means of God's love. When we die, we find eternal life in Christ.

There's always the danger of falling into the trap for us, as believers, set by Carl Marx. I'm not talking politics. Communism may be a trap for some, but here the trap is profound. Life is short, bitter and painful. Wait! We have Heaven! So as bad as life can be, all we have to do is put up with life's brevity for eternal bliss. This can lead to passively putting up with pain for a final reward. What was the name of the old Bishop Sheen Show? I recall it was, "Life is Worth Living." That's the true message of faith in Jesus. There's an old fable. A man was out for a walk. A tiger picked up his scent. As the tiger began to stalk him there was no place to hide or run. There was a cliff. Instead of being mauled, killed and devoured, he decided to take his chances and leaped off the cliff. People would then, at least, find his body. Fortunately for him, as he went off the edge, he was able to grasp a vine which reached the bottom below. He began to lower himself to the ground. As he glanced below he was horrified to see two tigers waiting for him. As he began to climb back up, he saw the first, pursuing tiger slaving above him. He held on to the vine dangling between top and bottom. He then noticed two mice, a black one and a white one. They gnawed at the vine. He saw a strawberry growing out of the rock in front of him. It tasted sweet!

Live life and keep others safe.

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