

Readings for the 6th Thursday of Easter

FIRST READING: Acts of the Apostles 18:1-8

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. He went to visit them and, because he practiced the same trade, stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. Every sabbath, he entered into discussions in the synagogue, attempting to convince both Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began to occupy himself totally with preaching the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. When they opposed him and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your heads! I am clear of responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." So he left there and went to a house belonging to a man named Titus Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next to a synagogue. Crispus, the synagogue official, came to believe in the Lord along with his entire household, and many of the Corinthians who heard believed and were baptized.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 98:1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4

The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done wondrous deeds; His right hand has won victory for him, his holy arm.

The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

The LORD has made his salvation known: in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice. He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness toward the house of Israel.

The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God. Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands; break into song; sing praise.

The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

GOSPEL: John 16:16-20

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Jesus said to his disciples: "A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while later and you will see me." So some of his disciples said to one another, "What does this mean that he is saying to us, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" So they said, "What is this 'little while' of which he speaks? We do not know what he means." Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Are you discussing with one another what I said, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'? Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 6th Thursday of Easter

Sometimes the Acts of the Apostles can sound like a travelogue. I have always wanted a better context for these locations. I have not studied geography since grammar school. The geography of Greece can be complicated. It is made up of a group of islands connected by a series of isthmuses and land bridges. Corinth is on the isthmus that connects the island of the Peloponnese to the mainland. The city has an eastern and western coast. Athens is on the mainland, near the coast, about fifty miles to the northwest. There were two ways to travel in Paul's day, overland and by ship. Fifty miles would take two to three days by foot. Travel by ship was the fastest means and sometimes the safest means to travel. The body of water between Corinth and Athens is the Saronic Gulf.

We have also gained some good information of current events. The emperor Claudius did indeed expel Jews from Rome. This is the same guy from the old PBS series, "I, Claudius." He ruled as emperor from AD 41-52. The expulsion was recorded here, in Acts, and by the historians Suetonius (c. AD 69 – c. AD 122), Cassius Dio (c. AD 150 – c. 235). Aquila and Priscilla were Jews who were refugees caught up in the banishment. Since Luke did not write as an historian but as an evangelist, the time-span of these events is unclear. This passage may have actually occurred over a period of months or years even though Luke told the whole story within a short paragraph. It is from chapter 18. The book of Acts has ten chapters yet before it concludes with chapter 28. As Paul's conflicts rise, his end draws near. We think we know Paul's death from the book of Acts. We do not.

Paul made a threat to those who refused to believe in Jesus through his preaching. I have compassion for Paul as a fellow preacher and I have compassion for the Jewish congregation who had to hear him. I wonder what we, as Catholics and Christians would do if someone other than Catholic or Christian came into our congregation on Sunday and attempted to convert, or subvert us to a new faith. I don't think we would welcome the unfortunate preacher into our midst for very long, if at all. Paul, in preaching to his own, because he still remained a practicing Jew while he believed in Jesus as Lord and savior, was basically banging his head against a solid wall of an ancient and deeply held faith. The Christian Church today is not Jewish but gentile. Judaism still thrives.

He had nowhere else to go but to the gentiles for a congregation and a source of converts. Belief in the One God was attractive to many pagans who had an entire pantheon of gods and goddesses. Corinth, as a port city, had many different pantheons from all parts of the known world mixing together in the first century. Belief in the God of Israel and his son Jesus was attractive for its simplicity and unity. Its mission of service had great benefits within the community. Its message of the good news of salvation, God's love and forgiveness could add much to the lives of believers. We have accepted this too as the descendants of Paul's converts.

I see in the actions of Paul adaptability and openness to new paths of action. Not only did the Holy Spirit work in the lives of people to come to faith, but in the life of Paul. His conversion to Christ was not a single event to which clung for dear life or where he remained, but a dynamic that was to remain active as he lived and responded to the challenges he experienced throughout the rest of his life. His experience of the movement of the Spirit is an inspiration and challenge for us all. May we be so blessed to respond like Paul.

In the gospel of John, the Last Supper spans the chapters 13 to 18. In today's reading Jesus is more than halfway through his last meal. Jesus death was impending and his words reflected what was to come. Slowly, the reality of death and ending began to dawn on the remaining disciples. There was the drama of the washing of their feet and the enigmatic departure of Judas and his special mission. What a shock were Jesus words, "You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve but your grief will turn to joy." What could they mean? Jesus told them that he would die, rise and then return to the Father. To not see and to see Jesus seems cryptic and unclear. He was really telling them that he was about to die and then rise. If the Last Supper was in fact a Seder meal, having led and participated in several, the participants partake in four cups of wine. The lads may have been intoxicated too. Often the gospels portray them all to be a bit dim. I can only imagine the added deadening effect of the alcohol on them. I don't know that if I were experiencing these events unfold that I could have understood what Jesus was saying either.

When we read or hear these passages, we do so from a perspective much different than the apostles. We live and have faith in a post Easter world. We already know what happened to Jesus. We already know who he is. All of these events would unfold within their lived experience. Jesus suffered, died, rose from the dead, returned to the Father and sent the Holy Spirit with them as witnesses. These readings of the New Testament we read are the stories of them coming to faith. Prior to the Paschal Events, they were tradesmen who moonlighted as disciples. After these events they became preachers, ministers and witnesses to these events. What we take for granted, they became. We are all the fruits of those events. Knowing Jesus was different for them as opposed to us. They saw Jesus in the flesh. We see Jesus through eyes of faith. They knew Jesus as a real, living person. We know Jesus when more than two gather in his name, in the breaking of bread together and in the privacy of our own thoughts. We catch but a glimpse of Jesus presence. What we all share is the expectation of Jesus' return. They shared the hope of eternal life as they live it now. We still hope in Jesus promise as we still live this life. We all await the resurrection when Jesus returns to fulfill his promise of the Kingdom of God.

Only in our hope of the Kingdom can we approach, in any way, the impact of Jesus words, in the apostles, of what will happen. We may know the events of the gospel's story, who Jesus is, his mission, and what he promised, but we, like they still have the expectation of what is still to come. The words of scripture convey the mission and ministry of Jesus through the witness of these men. They have long since died in Christ. Their witness has continued through all generations since. Their mission and ministry is now entrusted to us as we witness to others. With our deaths, we will die in Christ as well. The mission and ministry of Jesus will continue through the witness of those yet to come as we all move forward to Jesus' return and resurrection in the Kingdom of God.

May Christ be our means to hope and live his way.

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