

Thursday of the 6th Week of Easter Reading and Reflection

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.

Thursday of the 6th Week of Easter Reflection

Paul is always a bit of an enigma for me. He has the title of Apostle to the Gentiles yet he spends a great deal of time preaching to and arguing with Jewish congregations. His story often reads like a travelogue too. In my reading of Paul he remained a good practicing Jew. The reason he spends so much time with Jewish people was that he practiced Judaism. He went to worship on the Sabbath. He was also a believer in Jesus, a Christian. Today there is a firm distinction between Jews and Christians. It is easy to forget the origins of Christianity are Jewish. Jesus, the apostles and the first believers were all Jews. It was common for Jewish believers in Jesus to worship on Saturday with their Jewish family and Sunday with their brothers and sisters in Christ.

The elders in Jerusalem were afraid of Paul. He entered the story of Acts as Saul the Jewish hit-man and bounty hunter. He had been a staunch enemy of the early Church. They couldn't be sure if his conversion to Jesus was real or just a cover to infiltrate and betray the Christians to the authorities. They sent him away from Jerusalem, far away from the nascent Church. His conversion was real. He devoted his life to the spread of the Gospel. He became the greatest preacher the world has known. We revere his letters as part of Sacred Scripture. His letters were the earliest writings in the New Testament.

It's always good to have some clear anchors in scripture. In today's first reading we have two. The expulsion of the Jews from Rome has an historical date, about 41-52 AD. We also learn how Paul supported himself. He was a tent maker. We also know that Paul, as a native of Tarsus, was a Roman citizen. In this story we hear Paul getting together with other Jewish Roman Citizens. All the people mentioned have Latin names. The historical and personal anchors give us a sense of Paul as a person.

Many of the encounters that Paul had in the Acts of the Apostles ended badly. The Jewish congregations steadfastly remain rooted in their ancient, Jewish faith. Paul got beaten, arrested and hauled to court several times as the story unfolded. How did Paul handle the rejection and continue on his mission? Today's lesson gives us a hint. He shook out his garments and expressed his exasperation publicly. These actions showed that when he walked away, he attempted to leave not just the dust of the place behind him but also the pain

and frustration there as well. In a sense, this is also the basis of true forgiveness as we, not God, can offer it. When God forgives he also forgets our sins and remembers them no longer. We cannot forget. If we do forget, not remembering the history, we may be doomed to repeat it. Forgiveness for us frees us from holding on to anger and pain. We can then walk away not seeking revenge or to give retribution. For when we seek those things we show ourselves to be as bad, or worse, than those who hurt us. As believers in Jesus we know better. This may be the best lesson we can take and live from today's passage.

We can interpret the response, "The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power" in light of this lesson. We are all human and seek assurance for our faith in signs and miracles. We like to see God's direct and divine intervention to resolve problems in life. However, that kind of action by God is rare. The normal tools we have are prayer and reflection to discern God's movement as we live. God intervenes through the actions of people. Each one of us can become an instrument of God in the lives of others. God helped Paul's continuing mission by his action to shake his garments and move on. The simple gesture of Paul's action was a moment of God's grace.

Not only is Paul a bit of an enigma, but the words of Jesus in today's gospel are too. Tuesday's gospel showed the disciples could understand Jesus' words without question. Today's words have them scratching their heads in confusion. "A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while later and you will see me." I have to admit I had to read it more than once. The context of this saying is important. When we read the passage, we read it from today's perspective. We know the whole story of the Gospel of John. We know that when Jesus dies on the cross, he will rise from the dead. The disciple did not know this as we do. People, generally, don't return from being dead for three days. Did Jesus mean it in the context of the Paschal Mystery? Yes, he did. However, there's more, just like the commercials for special offers on television. Jesus went back to the Father on Ascension Day. He promised to return to establish the Kingdom of God. He meant that too. Jesus will also come for each of us when we die.

Jesus' mysterious words can make each of us stop and reflect to discern this three-fold meaning of his words. I have always enjoyed the complex symbolism in John's gospel. The text is rarely able to be interpreted on just one level. I find the complexity to draw me into the mystery of Jesus. Not only do Jesus' words have many levels of meaning, his prescient prediction, "you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy..." speak in more than one way too. He is speaking, in the context of the narrative, directly to each of the disciples. He also speaks to us directly as well.

We face an unprecedented crisis, the novel corona virus. Until there is an effective treatment to the symptoms of the disease, and more and more deadly symptoms keep coming to light, and a viable vaccine to inoculate people gets developed, every human being is susceptible to contract and pass on the

disease. If this is not something over which to weep and mourn, certainly the thousands of the dead and their survivors are. How will grief be turned to joy? Certainly that will happen with possible treatment and immunity. In the meantime we can focus on the tasks that will help prevent its spread. God is working through us now as we do these things to keep others and ourselves safe. As the weeks turn to months and new infections and deaths continue to increase, these lessons of scripture are most important to hear.

God works among us and through us as God worked in the life of Paul and as Jesus spoke these words to the disciples on the night before he died. We share continuity of faith and experience with those long dead believers. God worked among them. God works among us now. In Christ we will discover what we need to do and the grace to act. As we remember the story of scripture, we remember Jesus and one another. I call this remembering celebration. It may not be a party; it is certainly not fun. It is the way God has chosen to help us survive and live as we practice social distance by staying home. I have a notion that what I have just said in print is much the same as the gesture of Paul. I shake the dust of sadness and pain from my garments and move on. Yes, I am wearing pants.

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