

Tuesday of Easter Readings April 14, 2020

FIRST READING: Acts of the Apostles 2:36-41

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

On the day of Pentecost, Peter said to the Jewish people, "Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other Apostles, "What are we to do, my brothers?" Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call." He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 33:4-5, 18-19, 20 and 22

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

Upright is the word of the LORD, and all his works are trustworthy. He loves justice and right; of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him, upon those who hope for his kindness, To deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine.

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

Our soul waits for the LORD, who is our help and our shield. May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us who have put our hope in you.

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

ALLELUIA Psalm 118:24

GOSPEL: John 20:11-18

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Mary Magdalene stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the Body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and said to him, "Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni," which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and then reported what he had told her.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Tuesday of Easter Reflection

How does one come to faith? What can one risk when changing religions or churches? My own paternal grandfather was disinherited when he became Catholic. Exactly why he became Catholic is partly due to the fact that my grandmother would not marry a Protestant. I surmise, for the man died before my parents married and I was born, that he had personal reasons too. These I can never know. How much was the grace of God? We all believe that conversion is a free and personal choice. The choice would not happen without the grace of God, for Faith is a gift from God. How much is God and how much is the person? St. Augustine grappled with this question. He wrote, and this is a paraphrase, "We all live through the grace of God, Everything depends on God. We choose and act as if it all depends on us." It is far easier to see God's grace as we reflect and look back upon the course of our lives. It is much more difficult to see God working now. It feels, sometimes, that God may be very far from us. We live by faith not feeling. Jesus promised his presence, always. Remembering the promise can help us to know he's near.

I reflect upon Peter's preaching, powerfully persuasive enough to convert three thousand people on the day of Pentecost. Such is the grace of God! From our perspective, these people converted from Judaism to Christianity. On the day of Pentecost, all who believed in Jesus were Jews. Jesus himself was a Jew. All these people were in Jerusalem for a Jewish feast, Pentecost (in Hebrew, Shavout). Pentecost celebrated the first fruits of the wheat harvest and later the Law, given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Holy Spirit came to the disciples on a Jewish feast, hence the Christian use of the name. Jewish people did not stop being a practicing Jew. They added faith in Jesus as the son of God and Messiah who saved them to their Jewish faith. The Christians and Jews separated and became two communities of faith a practice after the year 70 of the Common Era. In 70-71, there was a Jewish revolt in Palestine which the Romans put down. The Roman Legions razed Jerusalem and the temple, carried off much booty and took many Jewish prisoners. The commanding general was Vespasian. His son, Titus, used the booty and prisoners to build the Flavian Amphitheater, which we now the Coliseum in Rome. It was in the aftermath that Jews and Christians became separate religions.

I have always wondered how much did Peter's preaching influence people's choice and how much was the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit was not with Peter, no one would have listened and if the Spirit was not upon the people neither would they come to know Jesus. I have worked for many years with the RCIA, Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. I have witnessed the coming of faith to many people. My wonderment is not restricted to a reflection on a bible story. I've witnessed and participated in the process of conversion in the same role as Peter. How much is God, the convert and catechist? It is all God who works through us all, whether we know it or not. Wonder and Awe is also a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Who was Peter? Who am I, for that matter? We are, like each of us, servants of God and the means by how God works. We can know this by faith if we don't feel it. As I type, I ask this now. God has given me something to write, based upon his Word.

The first witnesses of the Resurrection were women. This is noted in all the gospels. They experienced the leap of faith needed to know the Risen Lord. They then went to tell this Good News to the rest of Jesus' disciples. I wonder my reaction, if I were a First Century Palestinian male, to some excited women proclaiming, "I have seen the Lord!" Would I have been curious enough to go and investigate? Would I simply dismiss this as unnecessary drama? Again, the Holy Spirit was at work.

"For whom are you looking?" This question that Jesus posed to Mary Magdalene he also poses to us, through the centuries. Mary does not answer as I would for I seek Jesus and she sought Jesus' body. She did not find Jesus' body, though; she found Jesus. However, Jesus also found her. The Spirit, still again, was at work. Jesus admonition, "do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to my Father" is puzzling. What does it mean? I'm

not alone in asking that. Scholars of scripture have searched for meaning in this dialogue for centuries. I like to interpret the passage simply. It can be easy to fixate on a particular experience. Some can spend their entire life trying to relive an experience. When that happens, people can be closed off to new experiences. With the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, the disciples had to be open for Pentecost. It is the Holy Spirit that works in us and forms us into the Body of Christ, the Church. We don't seek the Glorified Body of Christ walking, talking and acting within the world; we seek the Church in action.

The last pandemic was over one hundred years ago in 1918. None of us experienced or remember what it was like. The lessons learned then, we relearn now. We have taken for granted our security and safety, our jobs and community and normal, human contact. Today with social distancing, our lives have changed. It has been over a month since we closed the church down. I've talked to people on the phone, used email and visited on Zoom. These are the next best thing in place of normal, human contact. This is our new normal, at least for the near future. Normalcy may not return until there is a working vaccination against the COVID 19.

Mary Magdalene may be alone in clinging to an experience. We are all faced with new experiences now. Longing for what we've lost may be a human response we can't escape, but being open to new ways of experience is one of the gifts of the Paschal Mystery. The Holy Spirit is still with us and working within and through us. We are apart through necessity, we are together through intent.

Be well and keep others well.

James D. Beath
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