

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

2 Easter
April 15, 2007
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Faith Alive!”

Today’s readings, on this 2nd Sunday of Easter, are all about faith. It is faith in the person of Jesus, who he is, and what his death means.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the teaching about Jesus is already beginning to spread like a wildfire. Even the City Authorities cannot contain it. Already, it has become the ‘Good News’, that Jesus was more than a prophet and teacher. He was the true Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

St John, writing to the seven churches of Asia Minor in the Book of Revelations, goes further by explaining to them the nature of Christ’s salvation. He tells them that the salvation Christ brings to the world is both cosmic and personal. Cosmic because it heralds in the Kingdom of God in a great war against the forces of evil, and personal in that it meets a need in all of us for personal improvement and a rejection of sin.

“How can I be a better person?” It is the question that Resurrection poses for each one of us. “What can I eradicate from my life that will make me nicer, kinder, more understanding, tolerant, generous and less self-absorbed?” When St John says that Christ has freed us from sin, we naturally think of past sin, but there is a strong sense that what Christ has done for us is to move us along to a higher level of humanity.

Violence, anger, rage, mood swings, are the manifestations of pride, vanity, envy and malice. Jesus’ teaching invites us to grow the virtues that breed harmony, peace, tolerance, forgiveness and love.

Jesus’ teaching does not change with his death. The only thing that changes is that he leaves us his spirit to help us obtain these higher graces. For John, Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega; the beginning and end of all things. In saying that, he invites each of us, as Christ’s followers, to place him at the center of our lives. In doing so his teaching becomes our teaching, his values become our values.

The Gospel story today, the story of Thomas not believing the others that Jesus returned and spoke to them, is a story that is so well known. It is a unique story because it leaves room for the rest of us when Jesus says “You believe because you see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” He is talking about us. We are his believing church who have not yet seen him.

Yet, there is a sense in which Christ has come into every one of your lives and we are better for it. Someone years ago flipped that switch in each of our lives, and now years later the

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weeks after Easter become this great adventure of setting out to proclaim the Gospel, the message of Jesus in some way or other. It is an adventure because we do not know who or where this mission will take us in the year that is to come. We only know that we carry the mustard seed of faith and we look to plant it in human hearts.

Today, we can look back 40, 50, 60 years to when that seed first took root in our life. I remember having conversations about faith with my Aunt Hannah when I was seven. She would look over the rims of her glasses as she knitted a complex Aran sweater and read a book at the same time and chatted to me.

“How do you know?” I would ask her. “How do you know about Jesus, Resurrection, heaven and everything else?”

Every now and then her clicking knitting needles would pause; she would pull on the ball of wool, and flick the page of her book. “I don’t need to know,” she would say, “I just believe. If I knew with certainty where would be the merit in that? Faith is a gift you don’t throw it back; you cherish it and make it shine bright. It is because you have faith that you lose your fear. Faith makes you kinder, more understanding and certainly more forgiving because you already know that you have been blessed.”

Then she would look at me again over the rims of her glasses. “Oh I learned a lot of it in school, just as you are doing now, but the learning didn’t make that much difference. I had already experienced the faith of my parents. They didn’t sit me down to teach me, but I saw how they lived their lives and treated other people on a daily basis. It was like reading the Gospel. There it was all laid out like a book; kindness, forgiveness, care for the poor the sick and the needy, reach out to the dying and those who suffer, respect all, love God, pray and fulfill all your obligations and God will care for you.”

Understanding this is to understand today’s Gospel. Faith is not just what we believe; faith is who we are and how we live our lives.

The Apostles in those early post Resurrection days believe because they have seen the Resurrected Christ. We believe, because we have experienced Christ in our life.

In the last six to twelve months we have all experienced so many people come to this church for the first time. From so many backgrounds they have come carrying their own faith story. We re so rapidly sewing together a great quilt made up of the Faith Stories of so many people. There is certain richness in that shared experience of faith. When it intertwines with other faith stories it seems to be the real stuff of Christian Fellowship.

St Paul speaks of this in his letter to the Romans, where he says that faith for faith’s sake is not enough. It is not enough to say that you believe in Christ and his teaching. Rather you must demonstrate that belief in you actions and in all that you do. We have seen so many

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examples of that kind of faith in the last year. It is a spirit filled faith lived in a practical way that has lifted us up, so that in our Eucharist today, we should be filled with gratitude for what God has done for us.

Tomorrow, we as a church community will gather to welcome the Schantz Pipe Organ into the church. We have looked forward to this day for over three years.

This pipe organ will stand for 100 years and more and it will do all that we ask of it. It is a legacy for future generations and I am sure they will appreciate it and our efforts to bring it here. But, I think the sober truth of the last three years effort has been the realization that our true wealth does not lie, in the success of our major projects and improvement schemes. Our true wealth lies in the hearts and souls of the people who have faithfully filled these pews and benches week after week. The efforts of some humble and ordinary people have astonished and amazed us over the last three years. We all know who they are; I do not need to name them.

Jesus in today's Gospel named them as those who did not see, and yet believed. I think tomorrow I will feel so privileged to have worshipped with them.

In our Eucharist remember Jacqueline and Eileen that God may bless them in this Eucharist.

Amen+