

17 May 2020

Sixth Sunday of Easter

1 Peter 3:15-18; John 14:16-21

When I saw “The Gospel of the Lord,” you’ve probably heard, I’m saying, “This is the Good News that Jesus has for us.” Gospel means good news. It comes from a Greek practice of a public announcement in the town’s square of victory for that city in a battle, for example. For us it might be hearing that Emily had a baby! Word gets out fast. We all look forward to the day these day of hearing that a vaccine has been discovered. Jesus message is meant to be good news like that.

We heard in the second reading today a **clear command** to followers of Jesus. Peter writes that we need to “**Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.**” All our pastoral council members are reading a book these weeks that challenges us to be people in touch with the Good News of Jesus and to be able to articulate, first to ourselves and then for others when the time is ripe, what’s so great about Jesus and the Church, and why we believe. Theologian **Karl Rahner** gave a clear if uninspiring answer in an interview once. As I recall, he said, “I was born Christian, and since that time haven’t found anything better.” I liked that response because it shows the importance of what we grow up with and an openness to what is good and true in other traditions. But, it’s not very helpful for anyone seeking a reason for the hope and joy in his faith.

Knowing that everyone’s different, **I’d like to share what I came up with last week as a reason for my hope**, as a reason why I believe in Jesus and am invested in my Catholic faith. The short answer is, “Because it helps.” The slightly longer answer is that there was a time as a young adult when I experienced an incredible amount of emotional pain—very minor suffering compared to many of you, just being rejected in a relationship, but for me it felt painful and hopeless—and after hurting in a vacuum for several weeks, actually embarrassed to turn to God for help, I sensed God wanting me to use him for comfort. I found in God a voice that said “**I love you, you are good, this suffering won’t be forever, and I have plans for you.**” I had a newfound sense of importance not in the affection of a woman but that I had a place in the plan of God.

I found this love of God credible in the cross of Jesus who knew all about suffering, and I found this love powerful because this crucified one was raised, carried through death to life.

And, as I moved forward, healed and more whole, I found that everything I had learned about God and Church at home, school and from going to mass were like books on the shelf that I could take off one by one and suddenly they meant a whole lot more to me. Love God and Love your Neighbor, Love even your enemies—there’s a life project that’s part of God’s plan. Be Merciful and Forgiving to others as God is Merciful and Forgiving to you. The Eucharist as a source of strength and patter for life of being broken and given. Our Christian and Catholic tradition has so much to help us and to help us help others. And at the core of it all is God who loves us, and, as today’s Gospel accounts says clearly, commands us to love one another. **That’s Good News to me.**

Like I did last week, I’d like to pause for you all at home to reflect, and maybe if you’re with someone, to discuss your reason for hope. **Why is Christianity “good news” for you?**

Last thing: I saw a news story about a University of Chicago poll that said two-thirds of Christians in the US see in our pandemic crisis a call for humanity to change the way it lives. It wasn’t very specific but

echoed something that Pope Francis said very early on—that this virus time is a time of judgement—not God’s judgment on us but a call for us to judge what is important to focus on in this life and what is not.

In the section of John’s Gospel from which our reading came, **Jesus is trying to do two things**, one more obvious than the other. The clear thing is that **he is trying to prepare them for his departure**...we hear last week—don’t worry I’m going to prepare a place for you and today that he will send the Advocate, Holy Spirit. But he also says that the world will not accept this Holy Spirit, and will in fact not even “see” or have a sense of the Holy Spirit. A little later in the same discourse he will tell them that the world will hate them. He is preparing them for his departure and **also telling them that because they have been changed by their time with him, they will no longer feel at home in their culture**. Their message of love and mercy, and the priority of loving one another will not fit easily into a world of greed and power politics.

What do we do when we feel at odds with the world around us? To quote Jesus, “Remain in me as I remain in you.” Sometimes that will lead us to the cross; it will always lead us to eternal life.