

**May 5, 2020 Blind Hatred Homily:** Based on the reading from the Acts of the Apostles: 2:14A, 36-41

In 1913, Leo Frank, a Jewish American factory supervisor was arrested on suspicion of murdering one of his co-workers, a thirteen year old girl. He was convicted in a Georgia court and sentenced to death. Following the verdict, there were howls of protest. Given that the state was home to the Ku Klux Klan, a notorious organization known for its racial and religious bigotry, it is possible that Mr. Frank was the victim of a gross miscarriage of justice. Under pressure, the governor commuted his death sentence to life in prison. A local group of agitators was enraged. They abducted the prisoner and lynched him.

Blind hatred fueled their rage.

In Harper Lee's justly acclaimed novel, "To Kill a Mockingbird", the main part of the story revolves around a trial in which a small town lawyer, Atticus Finch, defends Tom Robinson, a black man, who has been falsely accused of sexually molesting a white girl. In the story, there is no chance of Robinson's acquittal of the charge. Racism played a key role in his guilty verdict.

Once again, blind hatred and bigotry fueled the rage of the white citizens of the town.

Recall that blind hatred played a part in the death of Jesus.

In today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, St. Peter preaches his first sermon, the so-called missionary sermon, to an audience of Jews. The purpose of his sermon is to awaken in the hearers a sense of guilt and remorse for the crucifixion of Jesus. Peter cried, "Let the house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ whom you have crucified." (Acts 2:14) The people were struck silent by Peter's sharp words of rebuke. When they realized what they had done in crucifying Jesus, their hearts were broken. "What are we to do?", (Acts 2:37) they asked.

Peter challenges them to recognize Jesus as the True Messiah and repent of their sins. He insists on the necessity of a change of heart, mind and behavior. Nothing less is acceptable. They offered no objection. Why not?

At the death of Jesus, Luke showed the people ready for repentance. When they observed the death of Jesus on the cross, they had turned back to the city beating their breast in a gesture of remorse and sorrow. Consider carefully the words of the Evangelist: "When all the people who had gathered for this spectacle, they returned home beating their breasts." (Lk. 23:48)

We have a much clearer view of our misdeeds once we are no longer in a state of murderous rage.

We can derive many insights from today's reading. First, we can't help but wonder at the startling transformation of Peter. On the eve of Christ's death, he denied him three times in the presence of a servant girl; on the evening of Christ's Resurrection, he was in the upper room behind closed doors. Now we find him boldly and fearlessly proclaiming the Risen Christ to thousands in Jerusalem. Clearly, he was Spirit-driven;

Second, we are given striking evidence of the power of effective preaching. Three thousand opened their hearts to God's Spirit and celebrated the event with Baptism. (Acts 2:41) In recent times, we can look to the great Christian Evangelists such as Billy Graham and Pope John Paul II for their extraordinary witness and their outstanding preaching of the faith; and

Third, as sinners, every one of us had a hand in the crucifixion of Jesus. This critical point was made abundantly clear in Mel Gibson's classic film, "The Passion of the Christ". The hand you see driving a nail into Christ's body is the filmmaker himself.

All things are possible to the one who believes. By the grace of God, blind hatred can disappear and be replaced by a peaceful serenity, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Amen!