

## **Fourth Sunday of Easter / Year A / May 3, 2020 (Fr. Giese)**

There is no doubt that in our current situation, with so much shut down because of the spread of the Corona virus, it feels as if we are living significantly reduced lives. And, by many measures we are. Children are not going to their schools for classes and activities and sports. Many people are not going to their offices to work and other are not working at all because they have been furloughed. Gyms are closed as are most stores, bars, and restaurants. In many places, even beaches and parks are closed. I can't think of any live sporting events that are taking place. Travel has been dwindled to a trickle. And social interaction, especially for the elderly, has led to a burdensome isolation. I could go on and on about what we are not doing and the hardships that are part of this shutdown but you are aware of them too because you are, as everyone is, part of this whole experience. You are also, a member of the Body of Christ, you belong to him through your baptism and through your faith - and your faith in God is especially needed for the challenging moments of life like this one because your faith in God through Jesus Christ brings to you understanding; understanding that life is more than just activity, that a full life is more than one that is busy. A full life, to Jesus, is one that is filled with the presence and the love of God which we call grace. Jesus' human life was filled with the presence and love of God and it is something that Jesus offers us as we heard in the gospel when Jesus said: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." To Jesus, an abundant life is not one that is merely filled with things and things to do, but one that gives glory to God.

So where does such an abundant life that gives glory to God begin? It begins with a firm foundation that allows it to weather the storms of life like the one we are going through now. Jesus' words, when put into practice, when lived, are as he promised the foundation of the abundant Christian life because they are the source of morality and self-control that we absolutely need for a full life. Without a foundation for our moral choices, without self-control, we are at the mercy of our own emotions, temptations, and desires. Without a foundation for our moral choices we are at the mercy of whatever the group thinks is right. But nothing diminishes life more than sin and an excessive self-love. Jesus' words, when put into practice, give us the very foundation we need to lead truly abundant lives any condition and in all circumstances.

## **Fourth Sunday of Easter / Year A / May 3, 2020 (Fr. Giese)**

A truly abundant life is not only moral it also one that is courageous, a virtue we see displayed in the life of Jesus in so many situations, from defending a woman caught in adultery from a mob ready to stone her to death, to spending time with people who were considered sinful regardless of the condemnation he received; from preaching a message that many were not ready to hear, to going forward with his passion and death on the cross for our sakes, Jesus demonstrated courage and with it abundant life.

Jesus shares this sort of spiritual courage with us through the gift of the Holy Spirit which we see at work in Peter and the other apostles in our first reading where Peter, who had denied knowing Jesus at the time of Jesus' arrest, is now at work proclaiming to the same people who had called for Jesus to be crucified that Jesus is Lord and Christ and that they need to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

This same gift of courage that comes from the Holy Spirit should be at work in our lives too because it enables us to be courageous in our actions and in our words and most to help us to lead courageous lives; by doing things that are difficult, tiresome or unpleasant but which still need to be done because those things make life for someone else or for other people better. That is the courage of so many saints and it is the courage that is available to us from the Holy Spirit. From the Holy Spirit we also have the courage to be faithful to Jesus Christ when life is difficult and maybe even more so when it isn't. With the Holy Spirit we have the courageous honesty to say I belong to Jesus Christ, he is the shepherd of my life, he died for me and I need him. I need him to guide me, I need him to lead me, I need his presence to encourage me and I need him to save me because on my own I can't do it. With the Holy Spirit at work in us we have the courage to say, "I am a Christian." And the world needs us to be faithful Christians.

You see, abundant life is life lived with hope in God which is different from just plain hope. The Christian hope in God is based on knowing God, believing in God's investment in our lives, and God's self-giving on our behalf which we see in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and which we experience directly and intimately in Holy Communion. We of all people should have hope in good things to come which God has in store for us. We of all people should be confident that there will be, indeed, better things in store for us. That is an essential part of Easter. The apostles

## **Fourth Sunday of Easter / Year A / May 3, 2020 (Fr. Giese)**

and disciples of Jesus accompanied him to Jerusalem expecting one thing but in the resurrection of Jesus God gave them and us something unexpected, something glorious, and something far better than they could have ever imagined on their own; the knowledge of eternal life for God's faithful ones.

That personal confidence we Christians have in God is part of a truly abundant life and it is something that we have to share with the world around us; confidence that nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ who came so that we might have life and have it more abundantly.