

3rd Sunday of Easter – Cycle B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

Peter and John have gone to the Temple to pray. They encounter a man crippled from birth who begs daily at the Temple gate called “beautiful.” Instead of giving the man money, Peter heals him. Upon seeing the healed man, whom the crowds recognize, a crowd gathers around them at Solomon’s porch (the eastern side of the Temple enclosure). When Peter saw the crowd he addressed them “Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”

[Peter said to the people:] ¹³“The God of Abraham, (the God) of Isaac, and (the God) of Jacob, the God of our ancestors,

The Christian Church is a continuation of Israel (that’s why we are referred to as the “New Israel”). Here, Peter uses the hallowed Old Testament titles of God (Exodus 3:6, 15).

has glorified

Through the resurrection and ascension

his servant Jesus

This is no doubt a reference to Isaiah 52:13-53:12. This stresses the fulfillment of prophecy. After all, Jesus Himself said that He came not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17).

whom you handed over and denied in Pilate’s presence, when he had decided to release him.

Luke 23:4, 14, 22 all show Pilate as a witness of Jesus’ innocence. Mark (our Passion reading for this cycle) depicts Pilate as compliant.

¹⁴ You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.

This designation as “Holy and Righteous” emphasizes Jesus’ special relationship to the Father (Luke 1:35; 4:34) and shows His sinless and religious dignity in sharp contrast to Barabbas. Many of the crowd now may have been in the crowd which cried for Jesus to be crucified and Barabbas to be released. This reminds them of their individual participation

in this event and is not a condemnation of Jews as a whole.

15 The author of life you put to death,

The Greek word translated here, *archegos*, does not mean “author,” but “leader.” This verse might be better translated as “leader to life.” Like the Old Testament images, Jesus leads us to the inheritance the Father has promised.

but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses.

There are two apostles present and two witnesses are required in a life and death situation (Deuteronomy 17:6). These apostles are witnesses to the resurrected life.

17 Now I know, brothers, that you acted out of ignorance,

This does not dilute their guilt but explains why God still offers the chance to repent.

just as your leaders did;

The leaders are the prototype of an impenitent Judaism who have placed themselves outside the course of saving events beginning at John’s baptism and continuing through the apostolic preaching. The people have the opportunity to repent.

18 but God has thus brought to fulfillment what he had announced beforehand through the mouth of all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.

This was foretold long ago by the prophets, recall your history as you listen. The Jews themselves did not anticipate a suffering Messiah, they usually understood the Suffering Servant Song in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 to refer to their own suffering as a people.

19 Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away.”

Reform your lives by repenting. Turn away from an evil course of action and turn toward God and His new way of life. Heaven has been opened and sins may be forgiven and forgotten.

2nd Reading - 1 John 2:1-5a

Continuing with the theme of repentance and re-ordering our lives which we have heard in the first reading, we now hear John the Apostle tell us how this is done.

2:1 My children,

This word, *teknia*, translated as “children” is found only in Saint John’s writings. Like “beloved,” it is an expression of pastoral love (cf. John 13:33; 21:5; 1 Corinthians 4:14).

I am writing this to you so that you may not commit sin.

The Christian ought to be sinless. Saint John doesn’t take the matter of sin lightly even though the problem is universal.

But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one.

The doctrine of Christ as an intercessor in heaven is a common New Testament teaching. Jesus is named as “righteous” because only the righteous may enter God’s presence to plead for the unrighteous.

“There is a problem here. A righteous advocate never takes unrighteous cases, which ours of course are. What can we do, dear brothers? The only way to get around this is to follow what Scripture says: ‘The righteous man accuses himself first of all’ (Proverbs 18:47 in the Septuagint form). Therefore a sinner who weeps over his sins and accuses himself is set on the path of righteousness, and Jesus can take up his case.” [Saint Pope Gregory I the Great (A.D. 593), *Homilies on Ezekiel* 1,7,24]

² He is expiation for our sins,

The sense of the word usage here is not so much that Jesus became a sin offering as that in the sacrifice of Christ, God has revealed His forgiveness for our sins in an act of His gratuitous love and mercy. Through His sacrifice on the altar of the cross, Jesus opened heaven so that we can approach God and have our sins forgiven.

and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world.

The efficacy of Christ’s atoning power is unlimited – this is what makes Him such a good intercessor.

³ The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments.

A life lived in accordance with His revealed moral will echo the teaching of the Old Testament prophets. The author is protesting a “Gnostic” approach to religion that would attempt to divorce moral conduct from intellectual commitment. Saint John insists on not mere intellectual knowledge, but obedience to God’s commandments in a life which is conformed to the example of Christ.

“Often in the Scriptures the word ‘know’ means not just being aware of something but having personal experience of it. Jesus did not know sin, not because He was unaware of

what it is but because He never committed it Himself. For although He is like us in every other way, He never sinned (see Hebrews 4:15). Given this meaning of the word 'know,' it is clear that anyone who says that he knows God must also keep His commandments, for the two things go together." [Didymus the Blind (ca. A.D. 390), *Commentary on 1 John*]

4 Whoever says, "I know him," but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ^{5a} But whoever keeps his word, the love of God is truly perfected in him.

Living the commandments will make the person sinless in God's eyes. "[W]hoever claims to abide in him ought to live (just) as he lived" (1 John 2:6). Disparity between moral life and the commandments proves improper belief.

Gospel - Luke 24:35-48

The time is that first Easter Sunday. Jesus' tomb has been found to be empty by the women who took spices there to prepare His body (our Easter Vigil gospel reading). The women reported this fact to those who were awaiting them (presumably in the Upper Room) but they were not believed except by Peter who went to the tomb to verify their report. What we hear as our gospel reading is the second resurrection appearance in the Gospel of Luke – the first having occurred to the two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus (about seven miles from Jerusalem).

35 Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

These are the two who had been on the road to Emmaus.

36 While they were still speaking about this, he stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Shalom. According to *Jewish Prayer: The Origins of Christian Liturgy* by Carmine DiSante (Paulist Press, New York, 1985), *shalom* means much more than mere absence of conflict, it also means welfare, blessing, grace, loving kindness and mercy.

37 But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

The repetition makes it clear that acceptance of the resurrection

- 1) rests upon faith and cannot be the result of any human proof; and
- 2) cannot stem from earlier announcements of Jesus, which remain insufficient.

His appearance was totally unexpected.

38 Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your

hearts?

The word translated as “troubled” has various meanings: thoughts, opinions, reasoning, doubt, dispute, argument, murmuring.

³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet,

In John (20:20-25) Jesus shows His hands and side; as we heard last week.

that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.”

Ignatius of Antioch comments “Immediately they touched Him and, through this contact with His flesh and spirit, believed.” (*Letter to the Symernaeans*, 3,2)

⁴⁰ And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed,

Literally, “they disbelieved for joy” their joy was so great as to leap beyond belief.

he asked them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of baked fish; ⁴³ he took it and ate it in front of them.

Ghosts don’t eat. Jesus’ glorified body has no need for food but He was still able and willing to partake for their sakes.

⁴⁴ He said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you,

Jesus’ presence is now different from that before the resurrection.

that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled.”

Not forgotten or ignored, but fulfilled. Ignorance of the Old Testament gives a distorted view of Jesus.

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. ⁴⁶ And he said to them, “Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day ⁴⁷ and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations,

What was formerly said only of Yahweh is now said of Jesus. If you believe in “His Name” you believe in everything He represents.

beginning from Jerusalem.

Christianity must start from Jerusalem and expand to Judah and Israel and then spread to the whole world.

48 You are witnesses of these things.

Deuteronomy 17:6 requires the testimony of two witnesses in order to put a man to death. The apostles are all witnesses not only to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, but also His resurrection. They are able to testify not only to His death, but also to the new life which is available to all Christians.

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