
Deacon John Crerand



St. Michael the Archangel

6th Sunday of Easter – Year A (May 17, 2020)

The readings for the Easter Season are, in my opinion, the most wonderful on which to preach. Luke's detailed account of the disciples' encounter with the Lord on the road to Emmaus just fills the heart with joy and awe. The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd that we receive from John's Gospel, His promise to prepare a place in the Father's house for those who believe, and His pledge to give those who follow Him life in abundance console and inspire us. These readings completely overshadow the pain and grief of the Passion and Death of Jesus and resonate again in the Christian community the wonder of what Jesus accomplished for us through these actions.

As wonderful as these Gospels are, the other readings that Holy Mother Church pairs with them are equally inspiring. Acts of the Apostles, often called the second volume of Luke's Gospel, provides for us a history of the early Church. In this work, we hear again of the

Spirit's coming to the members of the infant Church, compelling the Apostles to abandon their fears and to announce Jesus as Lord to all who would listen. Peter and Paul in particular assume leadership roles in the community and the Gospel travels far and wide thanks to them and to their obedience to the Spirit's leading.

Our lectionary also provides readings from the catholic or universal epistles as well. These are seven epistles or letters by authors other than Saint Paul sent to the various early Church communities. Although their apostolic authorship was sometimes uncertain, the Church thought the dogma in these letters was so important that they were ultimately included in the New Testament canon. Reading these ancient universal epistles continues to inspire the Christian communities of today as well.

Today's second reading from one of these catholic epistles, the First Letter of Peter, is particularly poignant for us. We are told to "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope..." The community to whom this letter was originally addressed was in Asia Minor and had been evangelized by Paul. They were now being encouraged to remain faithful to what they had learned and had come to believe. Theirs was a community that faced great peril and persecution and clearly, they needed a word of encouragement.

Those words should ring in our ears today as well. The reason that those who originally heard this letter had hope is the same as ours. Our hope and theirs is Jesus Christ. By His death and his rising, Christians have come to know that the Lord has indeed conquered sin and the fruit of sin, death, once and for all. Through our baptism, we are incorporated into Christ's Body and can indeed inherit eternal life. While we sojourn in this world for a time and are immersed in its trials, we are actually destined for life eternal. We Christians live a dual existence. Our human life binds us to this world for a time, but our faith informs us that we are actually citizens of the Kingdom to come. Like those brothers and sisters who were contemporaries of the Apostles, we who live today cannot ignore what goes on in this world around us. At the same time, however, our main concern must focus on allowing the light of the Gospel to shine in this world, offering a blessed alternative to those who dwell in the darkness of a passing existence.

In this time of pandemic and uncertainty, these words of Scripture are most consoling. Our lives have been altered; our society has come to a virtual halt. We are like the early Christians to whom this letter was addressed, since even our churches have been closed and we are unable to assemble for worship without danger. While we do not live under a true persecution arising from political or religious beliefs, the practice of our Faith, that which brings us grace and spiritual sustenance, has certainly been curtailed by the threat of illness and death. The First Letter of Peter reminds us that we suffer these trials but for a time, and even as serious as they are, Christians should not give up, since it is in trial and tribulation that our Faith in Jesus becomes genuine, and we come to realize its true worth. In other words, it is when we encounter the inability to practice our Faith that we come to value it all the more and wish to draw closer to the Lord. It is when we come to know the inability to assemble with the body of believers for Mass on Sunday that we assess its importance. When we miss the taste of the Bread of Life while attending a virtual Mass, we come to realize how much we long for communion with the Lord. We understand what we miss, maybe for the first time, and we realize how we have taken our Faith for granted.

Even if our access to the sacraments, especially to the Eucharist, has been constrained, we can take further consolation from the words of the Lord Himself, who tells us, "I will not leave your orphans; I will come for you." We see the fulfillment of these words as we hear the careful plans of our bishops and pastors for restoring worship. These are signs of hope when we as a community need them most. Their careful planning focuses on the welfare of the community both physically and spiritually, and in a very real way, expresses the Lord's care and concern for those He loves as well.

While we will joyfully welcome and fully embrace the day when we can be the Body of Christ as in those days before this pandemic, we will always be marked by this time of loss. May we enter the future of our Church with a continued thirst for the Lord, a longing for the sacraments, and with deepened relationship with Him Who is our hope and the source of our joy.

May the Lord of all hope and consolation preserve us all until we can once again assemble to praise Him with one voice!