

The Sixth Sunday of Easter/Rogation Sunday

May 17, 2020

Reflection given by the Reverend Joseph Kozlowski via Zoom for Services held for St. John's (Wilson, NY) and St. Andrew's (Burt, NY)

Acts 17:22-31

Psalm 66:7-18

1 Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

Back in the 1980's when I was the Associate Director of Continuing Formation for the Roman Catholic Clergy of the Diocese of Buffalo, New York (sometimes referred to as the "Department of Clergy Brain Transplants"), I was enamored by the author of a homily service to which I was a subscriber. I thought it would be a good idea to invite him to give a preaching workshop in the Diocese. After contacting him, he agreed and we set up the workshop.

I don't know why I had such high expectations of this person, but when I picked him up at the airport and we were settling in, I discovered that he was a rather demanding house guest. I had mentally placed him on a pedestal, but my experience of him caused him to come crashing down to earth. In short, he turned out to be just a regular human being.

We often place our perceived heroes on pedestals and are disappointed when they turn out to be just like the rest of us. Fortunately, our Gospels do not treat the Disciples in the same way. Peter is often revealed as a stumbling, bumbling, denying person, and Paul is described as a persecutor of the Jesus Movement dedicated to the eradication of the Movement.

I think we put our saints and heroes on pedestals as a personal responsibility shelter. We think to ourselves: I cannot possibly live up to their example, so why even try.

Anyway, when the guest speaker gave his workshop, there was a marked transfiguration of his person. He revealed himself to be every bit the polished preacher and scholar that is revealed in his homily service. I believe that this is a result of his being able to tap into the Advocate that John speaks of in today's Gospel. This Advocate can also be referred to as the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of the Resurrected Christ within and among us. This Advocate, this Spirit is present in us from birth. It is signed for us Christians in Baptism and nourished by Eucharist.

Let me share with you a true story about a woman named Elizabeth Caraman. She was an Armenian who lived during the Turkish persecution of Christians. As a child, she witnessed the abduction of her father, who was eventually executed. As she grew, she found herself drawn to becoming a nurse. One day she was nursing an elderly gentleman undergoing a painful treatment. She often talked to her patients as a distraction from the procedure. She began to speak to him about her life experience and the death of her father. To her surprise, the elderly gentleman, with a tear in his eye, confessed that he was the one who executed her father. Now what was she going to do? She chose to tap into this Spirit within her. This Spirit transformed her from hatred into gentleness and love. She then proceeded to tell him that she forgave him. He responded "This Christ must be even greater than I ever imagined if the Spirit of this Christ can be revealed as living in you like this!"

And so I ask myself these questions:

How am I adapting to what is becoming “the new normal”?

What fears and anxieties am I wrestling with?

Do I have a community that provides some measure of support and security?

How do I tap into the hope that God has for us and continue to strive to be a gentle and loving Disciple of the Jesus Movement?

Do I experience the Advocate, the Spirit of the Resurrected Christ within me and within others?

How do I experience this Advocate?

Do I experience this Advocate as an abiding presence, even in the midst of fear, anxiety and social distancing?

Over the past few months, we have heard many stories of:

Health care workers caring for the sick.

Delivery people insuring the arrival of our goods.

Agricultural workers producing food.

People creating and donating masks and protective gear.

People staying home and listening to sound, science-based advice to save lives.

All of these are responses to the presence of the Advocate, the Spirit of the Resurrected Christ, the Spirit of a loving God within and among us. In the absence of physical connections and sacramental and liturgical actions, let us, who strive to become faithful Disciples of the Jesus Movement, trust that this Advocate, this Holy Spirit does sustain all of us who choose to love one another in thought, word and deed.

And so we pray (adapted from “Simple Prayer, Simple Praise” provided by the Reverends Steven Lane and Claudia Scheda):

All loving God, during this difficult season of illness and isolation, assist us with your grace so that we may not falter in faith, in hope and in love. Send your Advocate to lift our spirits. Strengthen us for what is ahead. Give us the gift of being able to support one another in love.

Amen.