

May 10, 2020

St. Augustine Cathedral

10:00 Livestreamed

Fifth Sunday of Easter/Mother's Day

On this Fifth Sunday of Easter Joy, God's Holy Word today asks us to be mindful of who we are as People of Faith, as those called to joyfully follow the Risen Christ here in 2020, in our day and time, even during these challenging times of the ongoing worldwide pandemic.

In today's Second Reading, St. Peter gave us one of the most inspiring, but at the same time challenging, descriptions of who we are as followers of Christ. He says: "*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own, SO THAT you may announce the praises of Him Who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.*" We who are baptized into Christ, as we were reminded at the beginning of our Mass today when we were sprinkled with Holy Water, fit that description---that's our identity, and it reminds us who we are in our relationship with Christ.

Of course, as we all know, even though we've been "chosen" by God, that doesn't mean that we always "choose" to follow God, nor do we always "choose" to do what's right; and we are all too aware that there are many times when we don't do "holy" things. But our Baptism still identifies us as "a holy people" who have been "chosen" to "announce God's praises", and that we are to leave the darkness of sin behind us so that we can live in God's wonderful light!

Even though our parish churches have been empty during this time of the quarantine while we haven't been able to come together, and as we won't be able to for at least the next few weeks, that doesn't mean that *the Church* is "on hold", or quarantined, or locked down in any way. Why? Because we are the Church. Peter put it so beautifully in our Second Reading when he invited us to: "*Come to Jesus, the Living Stone---rejected by human beings, but chosen and precious in the sight of God.*" Jesus is that "Living Stone"---He is the Cornerstone---He is the Rock upon which the Church is built. And Peter continues that same image by saying that we are "*living stones, (who should) allow ourselves to be built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.*"

That's what it means for us to be the Church. The Church isn't a building; we use these buildings to be the "gathering places" for the Church---for us, who are "chosen" to be the "holy" "priestly", "people who belong to Jesus", the Rock. We are the living stones fitted together with Jesus as the Cornerstone; we are the living members of the Body of Christ. That's what we

heard Jesus talking about in today's Gospel passage, which took place at the Last Supper. Jesus had already washed His Apostles' feet, and Judas had just left to betray Him.

And still----even at that very dark moment in Jesus' personal life----He took the occasion to offer one of the most tender, loving, and comforting passages in the entire Gospel when He said: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in Me."* And then He began to talk about *"My Father's house (where) there are many dwelling places"* and that He would be leaving them to go and *"prepare a place"* for them.

I would venture a guess that this passage might be one of our favorite verses; I know that's certainly true for me. I would further guess that in this "dark moment" in our world's history, as we're all in the grip of this awful coronavirus, and when we're all somewhat paralyzed, restricted from living our normal lives, those words of Jesus are the exact ones we want to hear; that we desperately need to hear: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled."* But then, because there's so much taking place all around us that is so very troubling, we might very well ask: How do I do that?

Just listen closely again to what Jesus said: "Do not let your hearts be troubled". Jesus is teaching us something very important here. He's telling us that we can "control" our fears. And how do we not "let" the things that frighten us, or worry us, or anger us from troubling our hearts? Jesus tells us the answer is: have faith in Him! And then, thanks to Thomas who asked Jesus how they could follow Him when they didn't know where He was going, Jesus revealed another comforting clue to how not to allow our fears to control our lives, when He said: *"I AM the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Obviously the way to hold fast to our Faith in God and our Faith in Jesus is to make sure that we are following Jesus "along the way" of our own lives, even during these troubling and unsettling times, that could make us feel overwhelmed. Jesus tells us: don't let it happen! "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Be strong in your faith. Resist those "voices" which try to poison our minds by telling us lies; by trying to lead us astray; by tempting us to wander away like the sheep we heard about in last Sunday's Gospel. Listen to the Voice of the Good Shepherd, follow the One Who loves us unconditionally, and to the point of giving His own Life for the salvation of the world out of total Love for Humanity. Follow the One Who IS the Way; listen to the One Who IS the Truth; trust in the One Who IS the Source of all Life.

Today, as we all know, is Mother's Day. It's the day when we honor and thank and praise our own mothers, and all mothers. There is no one in our lives more special to us than our mother is. Why is that? For lots of reasons. But the two most important reasons are because our mothers gave us life itself, and they love us unconditionally. And when we're troubled, or afraid, or worried, or sad---there's nothing like a mother's tender hug, gentle word, or loving look to make us feel better. Who of us can't remember many times in our lives when we went running to our mother with our latest injury, or worry, or heartache, and all she needed to say was: "come here and let me kiss that boo – boo"; and somehow, the pain magically went away, or at least didn't feel so bad.

That is the tender message Jesus gives to us today: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled."* *"Have faith in God and faith in Me."* *"Follow Me, for I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."* *Come to Me---let Me heal your wounds, let Me calm your fears; let Me forgive your sins.*

As People of Faith, as the "living stones" united with Jesus, the Living Stone, and as active members of the vibrant Body of Christ----the Source of our Life is Jesus Himself.

The Creed, that we're about to pray together---the Profession of all the articles of Faith, is a summary of all that we believe. But we don't follow the Creed; we follow Jesus. We look to the Creed to help us be faithful followers of our Risen Lord along the way.

As St. Peter reminds us, we are that *"chosen race, holy nation, royal priesthood and people of Jesus' own"*. But we have to not just be chosen by God; we have to also choose to love God. We are not just holy by association; we have to decide to be holy by choosing to not sin. We are joined to Jesus the High Priest; but we must decide to be "priestly" in our actions.

Today's First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles showed us the early Church fully alive in Christ. And yet, they had problems, as we heard the controversy over the distribution of food. But their clear sense of identity---and their commitment to remain united in Christ---- led them to pray and work together to find the solution, which resulted in the creation of the Order of Deacons to concentrate on the works of charity and service. For us too---to be fully alive in Christ---just like the early Church did, we must love God with our whole heart, and soul, and mind and strength; but we must also love our neighbor---as Jesus loves us---in Christian charity, in spiritual and corporal works of mercy, in acts of kindness, compassion, and tender love.

Faith in Jesus doesn't mean that we won't run into problems; we're all aware of the many problems and crises facing the Church today. But just as the early Church found a way to

resolve their problems, we too can we do the same as long as we are clear about our identity--- who we are as members of the Body of Christ. We are not just to be “nice” to one another; we are to be Jesus for one another. In other words, our Faith is about a “living”, vibrant relationship with Jesus---a relationship, like any other human relationship, that we must work at and pay attention to, and spend time with thru prayer, and devotion, and effort and attention. On the eve of His own awful suffering and death, Jesus took time to give us the “secret” of how to live forever, and gave us the key to know how to keep life’s worries from troubling and overwhelming our hearts. The answer is: Faith!

That gift of Faith came alive in us on the day of our Baptism. That gift of Faith has grown within us over the course of our life journey to this point. That precious gift of Faith will continue to guide us along the right ways for the rest of our lives if we follow Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, Who keeps *calling us out of darkness and into His wonderful Light*. Do not let your hearts be troubled by any other worries or fears. Have Faith in God and Faith in Jesus.

No matter where we are in life---young, middle aged, or “seasoned”----this Easter Season is a time for “New Life”; it’s a time to be “renewed” in Christ; it’s a time for us to live up to our spiritual identity. And when we do, Jesus will lead us along the right WAY; He will teach us the ultimate TRUTH; and He will keep us a-LIVE in Him.

And at the end of our lives, He will lead us right into His Father’s infinitely huge House, and into our own “dwelling place”, so that we can share Life with Him forever in Heaven. Alleluia!