Will I stand with my Master?

Second Sunday of Easter (A)

Today is the Octave day of Easter and the Gospel is set initially in the evening of the first Easter day.

We are told that the disciples were in the Upper Room, the same room that they had met with the Lord for the Last Supper. St John tells us that the doors were closed “for fear of the Jews”.

This has been an eventful day. The women had told the disciples that they found the tomb empty. Mary Magdalene reported that she had seen the risen Lord. Peter and John had been to the tomb and reported that the tomb was empty, as the women had said.

There was no doubt confusion about the meaning of what was being reported. Various ideas would have been floated to explain these strange events.

And the doors were locked. They were gathering in secret. They were taking comfort in one another. They were still full of fear and uncertainty. They were at a loss to know what to do.

One could imagine the room at times silent and other times animated by comments and thoughts. No one was clear as to what to do.

Then in the evening the risen Lord appeared in their midst. Suddenly. Unexpectedly.

His greeting no doubt addressed their own state of confused fear and uncertainty: “Peace be with you”. Indeed, he repeats the greeting: “Peace be with you”.

His next words reported by St John would have been unexpected: “As the Father sent me, so am I sending you”. He was commissioning them to be the agents of the continuation of his mission. At that moment that must have been the last thing on their minds. They were still coming to grips with what was happening. They were locked away in the room, not game to venture out on the streets.

The last thing they could imagine themselves doing was taking up Christ’s own mission.

And what about us?

Often the last thought on our minds is to be active missionaries, continuing the Lord’s work. Like the disciples we find ourselves preferring to stay hidden, out of the limelight. We find ourselves embarrassed to declare our faith openly and to engage in conversations that promote the Christian faith.

The environment around us is becoming more and more uncomfortable. We know that people now look down upon us because we still believe in the Christian faith. We know that many people are incredulous that we still attend Mass and want to be Catholic. The atmosphere around us has changed. It is certainly not fashionable to be Christian. In fact, the Church is on the nose.

The last thing on our minds is the idea of being active advocates of the message of Jesus Christ. Our preference is to keep quiet, to be unnoticed.

Today in the midst of our own personal confusion and fear we can receive the greeting of the Lord: “Peace be with you”. The Lord looks upon us as he looked upon his disciples and firstly wants to reassure us. He wants us to move from our insecurity to a place where there is an inner abiding peace, a peace that the world cannot give. Yes, the Lord knows that, like his first disciples, we are completely incapable of assuming the task he entrusts to us. But it is what he expects of us. We cannot be neutral about being his disciples and assuming his mission in the world.

His next words to his disciples in the Upper Room, and the action that accompanied it, are very important in the light of his expectation that they are to take up his mission in the world. He says to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit”. As he said these words, St John says, he “breathed on them”. If you like, he breathed the new life of the Spirit into them. This was a deliberate and decisive action.

He had spoken on a number of occasions at the Last Supper that the Father was going to send the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, he said, would be their comforter, their advocate, their guide. In other words, once the Lord was physically taken from them, they would be given another helper, another comforter, the Holy Spirit. Now he breathes this new life into their souls. He breathes the Holy Spirit into them.

The risen Lord has acted very purposely in his appearance to the disciples. His gift firstly is one of peace, a peace to still their anxious minds and conflicted hearts. Then the commission he gives them is to take up his mission. Finally, and with purpose, he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them.

The Lord does the same for us. His presence with us, now captured particularly through the Holy Eucharist, gives us peace. Secondly, he looks to us, each of us, to be his missionaries. Thirdly, gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit.

My brothers and sisters, the society around us is changing rapidly. We are witnessing the deliberate effort to remove the Christian foundations of our culture. We are finding that there is a growing hostility to Christianity. We are seeing acts of deliberate and grotesque blasphemy, as in Herman Nitsch’s so called “150.Action”, being promoted as part of the Dark Mofo event.

Dark Mofo itself is taking on an increasingly sinister nature. Its overt paganism and celebration of darkness and evil is a blight on our Christian society. It represents the very opposite to Christianity. We declare Christ as light, David Walsh in his Dark Mofo promotes the Darkness. It is a pagan darkness and has the touch of evil about it. This is a disturbing trend.

We find ourselves now in the situation of those first disciples locked in their hiding place. Like the disciples we can prefer to be hidden away. The desire for self-preservation can prevent us from doing anything that might be challenged or attacked by the crowds around us. We have witnessed people being howled down or belittled in the media because they dared to express their Christian beliefs. We fear the reactions of those around us. We find ourselves cowered into inaction.

Today, in the light of the Gospel reading, we need to hear the Lord say to each of us, “Peace be with you”. We need to hear the Lord calling upon us to have the boldness to take up his cause. We are meant to receive his Easter gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the time ahead we will be tested. Now we must make our personal decisions: will I stand with my Master who was crucified but rose again? To be Christian in the time ahead will take some courage and a decision to be a witness to the truth and to the light.

Archbishop Julian Porteous

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