

P Christ is risen!
C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Saint Peter reminds us this day that we are God's chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation called to proclaim the mighty acts of the God who called us out of the darkness and into His marvelous light. In other words, we as the church are NOT sent on a mission, *we are* the mission...we are the light amidst the darkness of the world today...this is the blessing that has been bestowed upon us as Baptized members of this Holy Apostolic Church.

From His Farewell Discourse in the Gospel reading today, Jesus sets before us an important assignment to be carried out in his holy name. This is not a mission that brings glory to us, on the contrary, it is a mission that moves us from the self in order to be the grace of Jesus Christ amidst the darkness of this world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer refers to the cost of this mission for us today that begins with the cross of Christ that is laid on every Christian:

The first Christ-suffering that everyone has to experience is the call which summons us away from our attachments to this world. It is the death of the old self in the encounter with Jesus Christ. Those who enter into discipleship enter into Jesus' death. They turn their living into dying: such has been the case from the very beginning. The cross is not the terrible end of a pious, happy life. Instead, it stands at the beginning of community with Jesus Christ. Whenever Christ calls us, his call leads us to death.¹

I have yet to read a mission statement by any congregation that says anything about dying, or even moving away from the self to reveal the gospel. What I mean by this is...we tend to see Christ from a very blessed or privileged position. And this position is difficult to move away from or look past. In other words, Jesus Christ looks a bit different from the impoverished streets of desperation and squalor. Jesus looks different from a cardboard box that has become a bed to lay on the cold and damp concrete pavement...Jesus seems a bit different when considering his presence in the smell of a homeless shelter. Jesus may be hard to hear when our bellies are screaming and begging for a morsel of food. But we sit safely and contently and shelter ourselves from this reality and see Jesus from our satisfied and safe perspective. Our context becomes our judgment that changes who Jesus is for us and blinds us to the true presence of Jesus Christ and most of all, to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are.²

Once again I ask as I have been asking over the last few weeks, do we truly see Jesus today in our lives and in the lives around us and what is our response to that presence? Moreover, what are the relationships we develop with others because of that presence? Do we see a need for those in the culture or are they simply considered an antagonist because they are not like us?

In April 2008, Pope Benedict addressed the Bishops in Washington DC by addressing the very perspective by which we view Jesus Christ in our world today.

¹ *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 4, Discipleship.* Translated from the German Edition, Edited by Martin Kuske† and Ilse Tödt. Minneapolis, Fortress Press paperback edition: 2003. Chapter Two, The Call To Discipleship, page 87, par 81.

² *Ibid.* Page 172 Bonhoeffer speaks of the blindness of judgment.

The goal of all our pastoral and catechetical work, the object of our preaching, and the focus of our sacramental ministry should be to help people establish and nurture that living relationship with “Christ Jesus, our hope” (1 Tim 1:1).

In a society which values personal freedom and autonomy, it is easy to lose sight of our dependence on others as well as the responsibilities that we bear towards them. This emphasis on individualism has even affected the Church (cf. Spe Salvi, 13-15), giving rise to a form of piety which sometimes emphasizes our private relationship with God at the expense of our calling to be members of a redeemed community. Yet from the beginning, God saw that “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). We were created as social beings who find fulfillment only in love - for God and for our neighbor. If we are truly to gaze upon him who is the source of our joy, we need to do so as members of the people of God (cf. Spe Salvi, 14). If this seems counter-cultural, that is simply further evidence of the urgent need for a renewed evangelization of culture.

The problem with finding Christ’s very presence in our lives is...we look for a Jesus who is just like us and not a Jesus who is like them. In light of this, do we, or can we, really recognize Jesus Christ in our lives?

Easter Sunday I began asking about the presence of Jesus in our lives and the role of faith within the presence of Jesus today. Furthermore, throughout the Eastertide I have been asking, do we recognize the presence of Christ around us and within us? I began asking this because Mary could not recognize the presence of Christ in the garden when Christ was standing next to her. In turn I commented that,

In the reality and in the influence of our culture we see the flesh or the person before we even see faith (*or the need*) and by doing so we miss the reality of forgiveness and salvation in the resurrection we share in Christ. Faith does not function as our culture functions. Faith does not look like the person who embodies it...faith is what causes us to believe that Jesus Christ has taken away my sin...your sin...and their sin.³

The following week we heard that Thomas, like any of us would in his situation, doubted the presence of Christ. The following week we found ourselves on the road to Emmaus with two followers of Jesus Christ who did not recognize Christ when he began to journey with them. Walking right beside Jesus they were clueless and I asked that week:

Look around the sanctuary right now...do you see Jesus? Do you recognize Jesus? He’s here...if you can’t see him can we say our sight is *also* restrained (*like the travelers*)...or can we conclude then that we just don’t know what we are looking for? We proclaim throughout our Eastertide that Christ is risen, undeniably, definitely risen...so where is He now and how do we recognize Jesus?⁴

I equated our daily faith journeys to that same Road to Emmaus with our road from denial to recognition, from ignorance to knowledge, or even hopelessness to grace and life. I then used

³ Rev. Kopp, Mark S., 20-Easter Morning A 2023, file title for sermon appointed for Easter Morning, 2023.

⁴ Ibid, 22-Easter 3 A 2023.

Aristotle's claim about recognition in that he declares recognition to be a change from ignorance to knowledge and this recognition changes the fates of the people involved for good or ill.⁵

A rather lengthy review, I know and I apologize, however when we claim to know the presence of Jesus Christ, our mission then as a disciple of Jesus Christ, is to take up our cross – meaning to deny ourselves...deny our privileged perspective...put that self to death and serve others as Christ has served us. Does this mean then our mission is to make ourselves known as a follower of Jesus Christ? Or, does it mean that as a disciple, are we called to make Jesus Christ known?

I pray that we see that our mission is to make Christ known in the world, and not ourselves...this is denying ourselves. But how do we go about that...what is it, WE need, to fulfill this mission? I know that I will ruffle some feathers, but it wouldn't be the first time nor will it be the last, but our mission is NOT and cannot be to bring people in, it is to take Christ into the world, take Christ out of here and make his presence known in the darkness of this world within this culture. Our mission is to make Christ known in our service to others in the relationships we cultivate, develop, and nurture beyond these walls.

This is what Jesus Christ is saying to each of us today, not me, I'm NOT saying it...but Jesus is saying to us in the beginning of what is known as his "Farewell Discourse":

¹² Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. (John 14:12)

This discourse is given by Jesus to his eleven disciples right after he gets up from the table and washes the disciples' feet and commands them to do the same the night before his crucifixion. Before he tells the disciples that he will be going away to the Father, he shows them how they will serve others. Jesus explains it this way:

(Jesus) said to the disciples, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord-- and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

He goes on to say:

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Jesus says: the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works. Jesus is telling us, the ones who sit here today and claim a faith in Jesus Christ, that the very faith we claim to have, empowers us to be more gracious and more loving than Christ himself. Our mission is NOT to have people come in here where we can be gracious and loving, our mission is not simply a statement, by our faith alone, we are the presence of that grace and love in the world and we make Christ known and alive when that grace and love is revealed to the world through our service to others in the world.

⁵ Baird, Forrest E. and Walter Kaufmann. *Ancient Philosophy Second Edition, Philosophic Classics Volume 1*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994. A summary statement distilled from his writings named after his son on the nature of good and of moral and intellectual virtues entitled *Nicomachean Ethics, Book IV* pages 411 – 424.

Are you looking for God's grace and love out there...it might be difficult to see because it is you, it is me, it is us, it is the manifestation of the faith we claim to have that places the light of Jesus Christ in the darkness of the world today...out there.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe in Jesus Christ and the salvation we are given through our faith in him. May this undergird our mission and may that mission begin in the understanding that we are the blessed priesthood of believers who are called to do the works of Jesus Christ. In fact, we are called to do greater works...not in here, but out there.

As Peter tells us in the Epistle reading, we are each an individual stone, each different and each precious in God's sight. But Peter reminds us also that we are built, we do not build, we are built into a spiritual house...a spiritual house of faith...a faith that is fed, nurtured, and sustained within an assembly centered in the proclaimed Gospel and in the Holy Sacrament of bread and wine. In these things is the very promise of grace and life. And like the bread that is broken and given to us, we too are broken and given for the world to be the grace and love of Jesus Christ.

Envision the amount of grace extended to us individually and see the grace that frees us from sin and death. May this be the grace we reveal to the world as we go from here.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.