

Homily 3rd Sunday in Easter Year B (15.4.18)

## **Jesus Christ the messenger of God** **The Catholic Church the messenger of God**

As we progress through Easter time, we get a sense of the mission of the Church, but I wonder, if you were asked by someone the question, "What is the Gospel?" I wonder what you'd say? Would you answer, "It's the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John?" Would you say, "It's the teachings of Jesus?" Or would you say, "It's the lived experience of being a Catholic Christian?"

In the Early Church, the Apostles and Disciples thought that the end of the world was close at hand, with the death and resurrection of Christ, and that Jesus would very soon return to take all the believers with Him to heaven. As you saw from the reading of the Acts of the Apostles, and as we see in many other records of Jesus in the New Testament, the main Gospel message was about Jesus being put to death and raised to glory. That was the message that was constantly on the preacher's lips, whether it was from the Deacon Stephen, whom we'll learn more about as time goes on, or from the apostles.

In the Early Church, there is very little of the teachings of Jesus. In fact, the gospels were virtually the last thing to be written in the New Testament. The experts say that the Gospels were only finally written, because the witnesses of Christ's life, death and resurrection were dying off, and they wanted to record the essential details of the life and teachings Christ, before the evidence of those who had witnessed those earth shattering events had gone.

Even if we look at the other New Testament writers, for example St Paul, who was writing his letters about 50 AD, just 17 years after Christ's resurrection, he never directly refers to the actual teachings of Jesus, except once when he quotes Jesus as saying, "It's better to give than to receive." And ironically that teaching isn't in any of the Gospels.

So the Gospel question is interesting, and the best answer is that the Gospel is most obviously a message from God. Clearly from a very early time, the Messenger, Jesus, became the Message. In other words, Jesus came with a message, a very distinct message from God, a profound teaching. He became the Message, from the first moments of the birth of the Church - the real true message of what Jesus and His Church has achieved for us. Within the passage of a short period of time, the new messenger, the Church, became part of the message.

So much so, that even Peter's hinting at it there, isn't he? Unless you 'repent,' he says, and subsequently that would mean 'be baptized into the Church' and join the new people of

God, you will not have your sins forgiven. The Church teaches, that she is a sign of the Kingdom of God in the world, and that is a VERY important part of the Gospel message..

The Church is only effective if the messenger - that's become the message - lives up to the message of God through Christ. Now of course, we humans fail. The Church in its human nature is flawed.

But we also believe the Church is divine because it was given its power by the original Messenger, Jesus Christ. That message of God through Jesus Christ and His Church, can never be quenched, despite our own personal faults and failings. The Gospel is not solely about what Jesus taught, but it's also about Jesus Himself and what He achieved for us, and about the Church created by Him to continue the preaching of the message. The Church is sustained and encouraged in its mission, through the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. We pray that we may know and believe that truth more deeply, and that others, seeing our Catholic Christian lives in action, will be drawn ever closer to Jesus Christ and His Church which is the authentic messenger of the original Gospel message.