

Homily 2nd Sunday in Easter (23.4.17)

Divine revelation through Scripture and Oral Tradition

This Sunday is called “Divine Mercy Sunday,” but I think it should also be called “Converts’ Sunday”, because we read in the Gospels of the vast numbers of converts brought into the infant Church through the life and teachings of the Apostles. The Gospel of St John contains the wonderful words,

‘these things are written so that you too (who have not seen) may believe.’ John’s Gospel was the last to be written, when by that time it was nearly all second generation Christians, and the original witnesses were dying off. So John wrote his Gospel with a purpose, to give witness to those left behind.

And then that beautiful letter of St Peter - the whole letter is written with a purpose to give testimony to those later generations of Christians. This first letter of St Peter is well worth another read at home, as a spiritual reflection, to see how your faith matches up to the enthusiasm and dynamism of the Early Christians. Of course, the Acts of the Apostles starts off by recounting the great missionary activity of the Early Church, and how so many were brought to faith in Jesus Christ. So it’s a great reminder and encouragement to us to fan into a flame the faith that was given to us at Baptism. Even after many years of commitment to Christ, the Lord still urges us, in an earlier part of the Gospels to, ‘put out once more into the deep.’

But there’s one hidden doctrinal element in today’s readings that I’d like to highlight. It’s the essence of the Catholic Faith and the Creed which we will soon profess once again. That doctrinal element is contained in the first lines of the Acts of the Apostles –

‘The whole Community remained faithful to the teachings of the Apostles, to the Brotherhood, to the Breaking of Bread, and to the Prayers.’

This is the bedrock of the Catholic Faith, which says that revelation is not just found in Scripture but in the Oral Tradition – that is, what was passed down, and handed on to us by the early Fathers of the Church. And this Oral Tradition gives us the absolutely fundamental guiding principles of the Catholic Church –

that is, how to interpret Scripture, where the authority for Scripture comes from, and the traditional authentic teaching that there are Seven Sacraments given to us to help us on our way to heaven. And this Apostolic Tradition, today personified by the Pope and the Bishops, and the Orthodox Churches is fundamentally different from the teachings of the Protestant Churches who used to say – though not as much nowadays, the Authority comes from Scripture alone.

And here we have another important point, always made by the Catholic Church, that if Authority comes from Scripture alone, that is, simply by reading the Bible, then who is to tell you what a particular passage really means, and the context in which it was written - who will interpret it for you, so that the Unity of Belief is maintained? This Protestant personal interpretation of Scripture accounts for the vast and growing numbers of different Protestant Churches, and the vast and growing disunity among Protestantism itself.

So the Early Christians remained faithful to the teachings of the Apostles, AND to the Brotherhood. Brotherhood doesn't just mean friendly groupings, it means Community, it means Communion with one another united by our common Apostolic Faith in Jesus Christ. And this again is a bedrock of the Catholic Faith – not just our communion with the saints who've gone before us, and with those yet to come, but also our communion with one another here and now, and with our fellow Catholics all around the world. We have vertical communion with those in heaven, and horizontal communion with those around us now, and throughout the world. Do you notice how the vertical and horizontal makes the sign of the Cross?

So the Early Christians remained faithful to the Teachings of the Apostles, to the Brotherhood, AND to the Breaking of Bread. This phrase – Breaking of Bread, was an early description of the Eucharist – the Mass, but for the Early Christians it had a slightly deeper meaning. The Early Christians had to practice their faith in secret because they were persecuted – what's new? Their Services were held in one another's houses – again in secret, and after the Breaking of Bread, they would further emphasise their communion, their Brotherhood, by sharing a meal. They saw the two aspects of the Breaking of Bread as interlinked - their

communion with the Lord, and their communion with one another, from which flowed support for those in need, and outreach to non - Christians.

And finally, the Early Christians remained faithful to the Teachings of the Apostles, to the Brotherhood, to the Breaking of Bread, AND to the Prayers. Prayer is something that is often undervalued. Every Catholic Christian should have a regime of Daily Prayer, as well as our obligation to attend Mass every week. That instruction and encouragement to daily prayer is found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Every Catholic Christian should raise their minds and hearts to God every day. It's our duty to give time to God every day. SO, like the Early Christians, be FAITHFUL to the TEACHINGS of the Apostles, to the BROTHERHOOD, to the BREAKING of Bread, AND to the PRAYERS.