

HOMILY

The Way of Life that Pleases the Father

Msgr. Ronald Richardson

Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24; 1 John 5:1-6; John 20:19-31

St. Agnes Catholic Church, Greenport, NY

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If you go into a store this week you will see Mothers' Day cards, First Communion cards, Confirmation and Graduation cards all prominently displayed. But you are unlikely to find any Easter cards anymore, except those steeply discounted for those who like to be prepared and buy a year in advance. In our secular culture Easter is long gone and for the most part forgotten — a beautiful day, but now just a memory.

We are a society that moves quickly from one thing to another. Time marches on and we don't have time to dwell too long on what were at one time the things of the moment. We have to keep moving so we don't miss what's happening at this very moment.

It's different with the Church. Indeed, with the church it's very different. We're always being accused of being behind the times. And in many instances that may be true. However, we Christians have a sense that time often passes too quickly and so we spend time in reflecting on things like Christmas and on Easter. We will take the time over the next several weeks that to think about what Easter is about — not just what happened 2000 years ago; but what its meaning is for us now.

What do we understand the meaning of Easter (the Resurrection) to be? One way to answer that question is to say that God has vindicated Jesus and done him justice. Jesus' execution raised doubts about his whole message and activity. The tragic end of his story raised serious questions for even his most faithful followers. Who was right, Jesus or his executioners? Whose side was

God on? It was not only Jesus who died on the cross. They had also killed his message, his plan for God's reign, and his aspirations for a new world. Now only God could say whether or not he was right.

So with a resurrection story like the one we listened to today in the Gospel, we can see the joy of the first disciples on discovering that God has not abandoned Jesus. For Jesus' followers, the resurrection is not only a victory over death, it is God's own response, confirming his beloved Jesus and denying those who condemned him. By raising him, God has confirmed Jesus' life and message, his plan for God's reign and everything he has done.

What Jesus proclaimed in Galilee about the Father's tenderness and mercy is true; God is exactly as Jesus described him in the parables. Jesus' way of being and acting are true to the Father's will. His solidarity with those who suffer, his defense of the poor, his forgiveness for sinners, are exactly what God wants. Jesus was right to seek a happier, more dignified life for all. All that Jesus taught and showed us about being human is the greatest desire God holds in his heart. His is the way of life that pleases the Father. It is the pathway to life.

Perhaps all this can explain the first Reading today from Acts of the Apostles, for its message has great implications for us today. St. Luke reports "the community of believers was of one heart and mind, and not one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great favor was accorded them all. There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need."

The apostles and first believers in Jesus had renewed confidence in the message. They went about putting it into practice. And people around them noticed it. "Great favor was accorded them all." It is in love and not suffering that God teaches us the true way. Suffering in itself is evil; it has no redemptive power of its own. It did not please God to see Jesus suffer.

What pleased God was the unconditional love that Jesus witnessed to on the cross. This is why the first Christians saw the crucified Jesus as the most realistic and extreme expression of God's unconditional love for humanity, the mysterious and unfathomable sign of his forgiveness, compassion, and redemptive tenderness.

And Christians ever since have believed in this. Think of the great witnesses throughout the history of Christianity who have been moved by this sign of God's limitless love for all humanity: Jesus on the cross and now victorious because God raised him from defeat to glory. Francis of Assisi, Damien the leper, Oscar Romero, Dorothy Day.

And this is what we are called to in our day. This is why we prolong this celebration of Easter — so we can reflect on these things and at the same time see what we are called to do; how we are to act in this year of our Lord 2012.

Like the first disciples we must go “back to Galilee” and follow his steps: curing those who suffer, accepting those who are excluded, forgiving sinners, defending women and blessing children. We must offer meals open to everyone, and go into people’s houses proclaiming peace. We must tell parables about the goodness of God, and denounce all religion that works against people’s happiness; we must go on proclaiming the nearness of God’s reign. A different, more friendly, abundant and just life is possible with Jesus. But people need to hear this – from us.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
No hands but yours,
No feet but yours,
Yours are the eyes through which is to look out
Christ’s compassion to the world
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about
Doing good;
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men now.

This is why we think so long on these things; so we can act.