

FIRST READING: Acts of the Apostles 14:19-28

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

In those days, some Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived and won over the crowds. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered around him, he got up and entered the city. On the following day he left with Barnabas for Derbe. After they had proclaimed the good news to that city and made a considerable number of disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch. They strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God." They appointed presbyters for them in each Church and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith. Then they traveled through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia. After proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now accomplished. And when they arrived, they called the Church together and reported what God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Then they spent no little time with the disciples.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 145:10-11, 12-13ab, 21

Your friends make known, O Lord, the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD, and let your faithful ones bless you. Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might.

Your friends make known, O Lord, the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Making known to men your might and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is a kingdom for all ages, and your dominion endures through all generations.

Your friends make known, O Lord, the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

May my mouth speak the praise of the LORD, and may all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.

Your friends make known, O Lord, the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

GOSPEL: John 14:27-31a

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Jesus said to his disciples: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You heard me tell you, 'I am going away and I will come back to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe. I will no longer speak much with you, for the ruler of the world is coming. He has no power over me, but the world must know that I love the Father and that I do just as the Father has commanded me."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 5th Tuesday of Easter

Apparently, religious bigotry is no new thing. I cannot sit back and judge the Jews who stoned Paul. Paul had done the exact same thing to Stephen, the first martyr. He became the Church's

greatest missionary and preacher. We cannot know God's true intentions for why things happen. We can condemn people's actions, but we must still love our enemies and those who hurt us. We are all sinners who are capable of doing evil in the sight of one another and God. Sometimes we do.

When I read these kinds of atrocities against Paul and the early Church, it is from my place in time and with eyes of faith. What would my reaction be if some upstart came into Divine Savior with a new faith and message and claimed to be speaking the Word of God's truth? I wouldn't drag them out of the church and stone them to death, but I'd try to shut them up and leave the church as soon as possible. That's just what Paul and his cohorts were attempting to do. Jesus' command of love is not always easy to live. I can still judge others as I desire them to conform to my ways and faith. For above all, I am still a sinner who needs God's salvation. I need God's grace above all else to fulfill Jesus' command to love as he has loved me. This is the challenge that we all face. Failure is always our option. Only God will forgive. When I cannot, God can and will. Jesus died for all people, whether they believe or not. God dwells with those who are oblivious of God. We, through eyes of faith, are the ones to know God's presence in them.

I have been a parish priest for almost all of my adult life. I have never had to face a violent and unbending congregation, as did Paul. I may have had a few homilies that have completely bombed and many merely mediocre. I have preached some with a challenging message hard to hear, but I have always faced a congregation that is receptive to what I may present. That's a gift that Paul didn't have for which I am grateful. People have challenged me, sometimes, never with a death attempt. By the grace of God and the love of the Holy Spirit have we come to faith and receptivity to God's Word.

Today's gospel will repeat, mostly, on Sunday. I hate it when this happens. Hate may be a strong word. I hate repeating myself a few days later may be a better way of putting it. Can I find more meaning for a reflection for Sunday? That puts the challenge into the best perspective. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I can and will. Today, two lines struck me. One will be repeated on Sunday, the other will not. Verses 30-31 are omitted in Sunday's reading. When someone tells me not to be troubled or afraid, what am I going to be? Troubled and afraid for sure. Before the advice, I would be oblivious to what will happen. It's like with an approaching meal time and being hungry and someone tells me not to think of pizza. What's the only thing on my mind?

Jesus was telling the eleven lads that he was going to die the next day. This was trauma. This was pain. Their leader, teacher and the one they came to believe was God's Messiah and savior was to die the death of a criminal. What other kind of response could these very human guys have? Dread, fear, grief and pain; that's what. How could they trust with no safety net beneath them as Jesus ripped away their ground? How have I responded when my loved ones and those who've helped to shape me have died? We may call them saints today and put their effigies up on pillars; but then, they were as human as I am.

But yet, everything worked out just as Jesus had predicted. His lads, after Easter and Pentecost were able to pull it off. Jesus' life became theirs. We believe and live as Jesus' Church today. They came to trust Jesus completely. Can we? Remember what we face in July and then in September. Can Jesus advice take root in us? Trust is just as much a gift as life and faith. God gives them all.

The ruler of the world is coming. This is the other line that grabbed me. Who is the ruler of the world? A politician? Big business? Satan, perhaps? If so, they would make Jesus' cross a lie and Jesus' resurrection a failure. Who created the world and all of us in it? Whom can we find reflected in all people, places, things and events? Who was responsible for Jesus dying and rising? Certainly not Caesar, the mob nor the Jews. It was God's plan formed before God created the cosmos. Jesus did God's will. What a difference God can make since God rules the world and we pray to do God's will. With eyes of faith can we see the wonder?

It is through our witness to faith that God works. Seek God not the devil. Trust not in princes; trust in the Lord. We may see power in war-machines, technology, economics and politics. That will lead to a world we live in now. We strive to the Kingdom of God and the true power is the magnificent out-pouring of love by the Holy Spirit. Through the events in Acts, God prevailed. Jesus fulfilled God's mission of salvation through his death and resurrection. Seek God in all people, events places and things. We will find God's presence, who has defeated sin, Satan and death.

May we know God wherever we may be.

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