

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

September 16, 2012

We call the Third Reading from Scripture that we proclaim at Mass the Gospel, which literally means “good news.” But some folks think that the proclamation of the Good News means that we don’t have to face the reality of the Bad News. But before we can really understand the Good News that Jesus offers us we must face the Bad News that exists in our lives and in our world. We cannot separate the two. And there sure is enough Bad News.

I once was at the dedication of a new church building in this Archdiocese. The sculpture high above the altar showed a healthy-looking Jesus standing before Mary Magdalene in a garden. His hands outstretched in triumph. Jesus is risen. Good News indeed! But the former pastor next to me saw the trouble at once: “No nail holes,” he grumbled. Jesus’ outstretched hands were uncut. No thorns had scratched his brow. He was serene and glorious but not the crucified Christ.

The disciples in today’s Gospel were wrapped up in the Good News. After all, they had seen the wonderful works of Jesus, his miracles and healings. It was enough for Peter to proclaim that Jesus indeed was the Messiah. Now after years of domination and persecution by the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the People of Israel were anxious for the Messiah to lead them into victory. He would be the most destructive conqueror in history, smashing all of Israel’s enemies into submission. That was the disciples’ notion of the Messiah when Peter proclaimed: “You are the Christ!”

But Jesus absolutely rejected such a notion. Instead he saw his Messiahship in terms of the Suffering Servant whom we heard about in the First Reading from the prophet Isaiah. And so he told the disciples “that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected... and be killed, and only then rise after three days.” Peter rejected this notion of the Suffering Messiah. Peter the Rock became a stumbling block in the journey of Jesus, just as Satan had been in his temptations to Jesus in the desert, which is why Jesus said: “Get behind me, Satan.”

Jesus tells all of us who would be his followers that if we wish to come after him, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. There is no risen Lord without the crucified Lord. There is no Good News without squarely facing the Bad News, the crosses in our lives and our world.

The Good News is that despite our brokenness and daily crosses, we can still praise God and even give God thanks because the Lord is our help. The Eucharist that you and I celebrate today is done in memory of Jesus Christ, who, on the night before he died, turned to God and praised and thanked God out of the depths of his anxiety and distress. Our Sunday praise and thanksgiving is not the quick fix to solve all our problems. Our Sunday praise and thanksgiving is to a God whose Son suffered and died for us, and that's the kind of Good News that requires an Alleluia! Alleluia? Alleluia!

Paul A. Magnano

Pastor