

Friday Octave of Easter 2015 - Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

Introduction

This is my first opportunity to say, “Happy Easter!” We are still in the Octave of Easter, the eight-day celebration of the Lord’s Resurrection, with each of the eight days being nearly as good as celebrating Easter itself. The number eight was chosen to extend the celebration a day longer than a week, and this as a way of symbolizing the deep truth that in the Resurrection of Christ from the dead the boundaries of time and space have been rent by eternity. In rising from the dead in our humanity Christ has opened for us the new world of inexpressible joy, of love beyond all telling, of unbetrayable trust. So happy Easter!

In the midst of this season of joy and the richest of graces, the daily Scripture readings run on two tracks that eventually converge. The first track is the sheer wonderment, amazement, confusion, fear, and joy that the Apostles and Jesus’ first followers experienced when the Risen Lord appeared to them, spoke to them, ate and drank with them, and opened their minds to the understanding of Scripture itself. The second is the post-Pentecost boldness with which Peter and the other Apostles proclaimed the Good News, cured the sick, and brought large numbers to the faith. Today’s Scripture readings follow this two-track pattern.

The Post Easter - Pre-Pentecost Peter

Let’s begin with the post-Easter, pre-Pentecost Simon Peter. We meet him in today’s Gospel reading according to St. John. From reading this account, I get the impression that Peter and the other disciples tried to get off an emotional roller coaster: the lows of mourning the brutal death of their Teacher and Master, on the one hand and the dizzying heights of encountering the Risen Lord, on the other. It seems they tried to turn the clock back by going back to their old trade, viz., fishing, and without much success, I might add. Just when they thought they had escaped his presence, Jesus appears on the shore and instructs them to cast their nets over the

right side of the boat. Because Peter and the disciples are still slow to comprehend and believe, the Risen Lord provides them with yet another sign of his power in the miraculous catch of fish, 153 of them to be exact.

It was not Peter, the office-holder appointed by Jesus to lead the Apostles, who recognized that it was the Risen Lord standing on the seashore. Rather it was John, the Beloved Disciple, who recognized the Risen Lord, with the eyes of faith and a heart full of love. There he was, cooking their breakfast, inviting them to eat, recalling the institution of the Eucharist in the Upper Room. The disciples saw and they believed.

The Post-Pentecost Peter

Now meet the post-Pentecost Simon Peter in the Acts of the Apostles. Peter and John cured a crippled man as they entered the temple area where they preached the name of Christ truthfully and courageously. The boldness and effectiveness of their preaching was not due, to any cleverly concocted myths, as Peter himself would later write, but rather to encounters with the Risen Christ consummated by the Holy Spirit.

Without any thought of ever turning back to his former way of life, Peter stands before the leaders of the people and boldly defends his curing the crippled man, proclaiming “the Name above every other name” – the only Name by which humanity can be saved.

This time Peter did not catch a mere 153 fish but instead Scripture tells us the number of believers grew to about 5,000, about the same number Jesus had fed with the miraculous loaves and fish. Indeed, Peter’s preaching, which originated in his encounter with the Risen Lord, and quickened by the power of the Holy Spirit, proved to be extraordinarily effective and fruitful ... his numbers just kept climbing.

Convergence

Earlier I said, the two tracks of the Easter readings, call them the pre-Pentecost Peter and the post-Pentecost Peter, would eventually converge. I now submit they must converge in us. We have all encountered the Risen Lord Jesus. We do so when Scripture is proclaimed and when we receive the Eucharist. Yet, like Peter and the other Apostles, prior to Pentecost, we are by turns amazed and timid, and ever so

ready so to re-immense ourselves in our daily activities that we leave behind that new life Jesus won for us by his Resurrection.

We are called not merely to encounter Christ and then to return to business as usual but rather to allow the Holy Spirit to transform our encounter with Christ into a life-changing experience that gives us joy, boldness, and effectiveness in bearing witness to the only Name by which we are saved. Once that happens we will not be content with our lives of faith unless and until they are bearing fruit for the Kingdom of God, just as did the preaching of the post-Pentecost Peter.

Conclusion

As a church leader I sometimes don't like to hear statistics on declining Mass attendance and sacramental practice. I try to tell myself not to get too hung up on the numbers game. Yet every Easter Sunday morning thousands upon thousands of non-practicing Catholics and other seekers show up at Mass.

Some time ago, a priest told his bishop how angry he gets about this. "Where are those people the other 50 or 51 weeks of the year?" he asked. The bishop replied, "Father, you have two choices. You can either be angry at these people or you can evangelize them." That's what the post-Pentecost Peter would have us do.

What if each Knight of Columbus brought back just one lapsed Catholic per year? It might be a family member, a co-worker, even a fellow Knight who stopped going to Church. Imagine the hope, the joy, the amazement, and the renewed courage we would all experience in the Risen Lord.

May He bless us and keep us always in His love!