

## Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, May 23rd 2017

We are Easter people – we have been through the 40 days of Lent, we have grieved on Good Friday as we traveled the Stations of the Cross including the Crucifixion, and we have rejoiced and celebrated the Resurrection. Now we continue reading through the Acts of the Apostles as they go on as Easter people trying to understand and live the “next steps.” Our gospels have been from John as he tells the stories of Christ after His resurrection visiting with the apostles in different ways always explaining what is happening and what is about to happen. It is still difficult for the apostles to fully understand all of this (not unlike us at so many times) as they continue to navigate the rest of their journey.

Today’s first reading depicts a time well after Jesus has Ascended since Paul is now preaching the works of Christ and no longer persecuting the followers. Now Paul is on the side of those being persecuted, in fact, he is persecuted. As a child, I often wondered about this time what would it be like? I was enthralled with books and movies depicting these early Christians. I remember checking out many books in the library that told of these stories, *The Robe*, *Ben Hur*, *Quo Vadis*, for example. I would read them with great interest frequently imagining me at that time. How would I keep my faithfulness in the face of danger? Could I stand before the enemy and still firmly avow my God? What would I do as the jailer in this reading?

The jailer in this passage must have been very confused. He was ordered to keep these prisoners guarded securely – an order he took very seriously as he placed Paul and Silas in the inner cell and further secured them by chaining their feet. I’m sure he thought he was doing a great job until the earth quaked and everything changed. I can’t imagine what was going through his head as he realized he failed miserably at what he was charged to do. He was even going to take his own life for his failure. Yet somehow with all of this, he asks what he can do to be saved. Clearly his whole life is about to change – he certainly cannot keep this job, his family now saved but also in grave danger. I am in awe that rather than running as far as he could with all this happening, he is moved to ask to be saved. How do I nurture such faith as this man had? Our witness of God’s presence and power is more subtle and yet just as majestic. If I allow myself to truly see with the eyes of a Christian, I can see and feel earthquakes every day. The everyday miracles of new life, of found love, and unparalleled sacrifice – these are around me if I allow myself to see, if I resist the power of Satan to focus on the hate and contempt in this world and feel the good . . . .

In our gospel, Jesus is starting His good-bye. The apostles understandably are grieving – they are going to lose Him again. They cannot yet see the whole picture and how this story must unfold. Perhaps they are fearful of how all of this will turn out. There is a bravado when He is around – they have more confidence about what the future can be. But now . . . they are confused again, the fears return. When I read of the apostles, I am always reminded how much they are like us in so many ways. They want to believe, they want to do the right thing but they have fears and doubts. They have human characteristics just like us – pride, stubbornness, and the list goes on. Jesus understood this and

sent the Advocate. The Holy Spirit would soon descend upon them and strengthen them in unbelievable ways providing them skills beyond their understanding and courage to go forward and change the world. There is another way we are like the apostles, we, too, have the Holy Spirit with us – not the dramatic tongues of fire – but with us if we pray and believe it. We, too, can be strong in ways we don't fully understand.

We are never alone, never without the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit – as long as we open that door . . .

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