

## Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, May 5th 2013

### PRE-PRAYERING

The wife of the American President Franklin Roosevelt, Eleanor, once said, “Every day, “do one thing that scares you.” Being his wife during the war-time years would have scared her abundantly. There is a place in our lives and relationship with God, for fear. Being frightened is such a human experience; there must be a way of trusting God while reverencing this emotional reality.

We walk back down the aisles of our churches out into a world of unknowns. We could stay in church and safely protect ourselves, except from slivers. We are sent to face our lives with faith and fears. Fears mean that somethings are important to us. We protect what we consider valuable, precious, and meaningful.

As we walk from one liturgy to the next we experience the threats of fear and the invitations to trust the God who makes a home within us through the Holy Spirit. If we do a scared thing, then let it also be a sacred thing. We are sent by the Eucharist to live, express, and enjoy life, even the slivers perhaps.

### REFLECTION

The early Church had some start-up problems. We hear of one and its resolution in today’s First Reading from Acts of the Apostles. Male circumcision for the Jews was the proper rite of initiation. Bountiful progeneration was a promise by God to Abraham and his descendants. Circumcision was the sign of Jewish dedication to that promise.

The Jews who formed the early followers of Jesus were forced to a reconsideration when “pagans” and “gentiles” wanted to enter, or be initiated, into the growing Church. Should they be forced to be circumcised into their Jewish tradition in order to enter their following of Jesus? There was not unanimity about this answer.

What we hear is how some were teaching that those entering the Church did have to experience the Jewish rite first. So there was a convention of sorts and we hear the decision in the form of a letter which is sent to Antioch correcting this important issue. Baptism begins the circumcision of the heart, we say. The heart is the symbol of a loving spirit, but the heart can find itself dedicated to various forms of idolatry. The heart can generate a life leading, not to eternal life, but to being lost. What is required for entering into the Way of Jesus is presented to the people of Antioch and so for a while that question had been answered. It would arise again during the history of the Church even to this day.

There were many factions in the time of the writing of John's Gospel. Some believed that Jesus was not really human, but just seemed that He was. Others believed that He was not really divine, but was kind of adopted by God to appear divine. By the time of the writing, about a century after His historical life, various groups in differing locations who were struggling with the mystery of Jesus, in good faith, came up with these differing understandings. These schools of thought continued their teachings until the maturing Church came together and eventually wrote out what we call the Creed, which we recite each Sunday. Jesus was and is or course, a tremendous mystery, one person, two natures, that does take some struggling, pondering, and deep faith.

John's whole Gospel has more to do with the faith-growth of the first and second centuries, than with an exact and historical relating of the events of the life of Jesus. The events of His life are actually quite limited compared to those which are related in the first three Gospels. There are more discourses, arguments and poetic expressions in John's Gospel which are all intended to attract followers to Jesus and keep them together as followers of "the One Who has been sent." We have those same struggles and wonderings about Jesus and our willingness to respond to His ways. What we read today and will hear next Sunday are verses intended to encourage us in living with the promise of the Holy Spirit Whose coming we will celebrate in two weeks. As followers in the Church we are listening in to Jesus comforting, encouraging and blessing us.

Now for a brief reflection on this encouraging passage. Abandonment! My younger brother, at the age of six, was put on a city bus by his older brother and was told to stay on until the end of the line. Across the street from the end of the line was our house. This was quite a trauma, being left alone on this huge bus with all these strange people and a driver whom Pat didn't know. He did ask the driver if the bus was going to Forty-Third Street and was that forty-third street in Milwaukee and was there a big white house across the street? No amount of assurance was satisfying, nor is it still to this day.

The Divine Bus Driver is telling us, his passengers, that we will not be left alone, but actually we will be the "Big White House" the dwelling place of God if we believe. Believing does invite questions, but we are invited to trust what the Driver says.

The “world” gives a sense of peace which is temporary and conditional. Jesus offers a peace which results from the permanent relationship He offers us through his Gift of the Spirit. We do have worries and fears which are appropriate for us as fragile “bus-riders”. We are comforted by knowing there are other “riders” who for centuries have ridden with their fears and yet in faith. The “world” needs certainty and demands the security of knowing. Human relationships of love go leaping into future “bus-rides” together. This leaping, yes this, is how we fulfill his request that we love him by keeping his Word. His Word is not a command or law, but an invitation to be aware and accepting of his love for us during his life, death, and resurrection, and now in his sending of the Holy Spirit.

God loves us in Christ, but this love does not protect us from experiencing worries and fears. That love does not protect us from bumping our noses, stubbing our toes, breakings of hearts, nor losing our way. His love does not protect us from our being human, but encourages us to get on the bus, stay on the bus until we get to the end of the line where our home is right across, well, over there.

“If you love Me, keep my commandments, says the Lord, and I will ask the Father and He will send you another Paraclete to abide with you forever. Alleluia.”

Larry Gillick, S.J.