

6th Sunday of Easter A/2011

I would like to start this homily with these beautiful words of St Paul: "We know that all things work for good for those who love God" (Romans 8, 28). According to these words, every happening of our life, as sad as it might be, can always become an opportunity for God's blessing and grace on us.

This truth is confirmed in today's first reading as it relates the story of the growth of the Church in the city of Samaria following the persecution of the disciples in the aftermath of the passion and the death of Jesus.

As a matter of fact, when the disciples were persecuted and they fled in the neighboring lands and villages, none of them would think that this painful and sad event would turn into something beneficial for the Church. And yet, that is exactly what happened, because from the teaching of Phillip many people from Samaria believed in Jesus and entered the Church.

What this episode teaches us is, first of all, that God can use any event of our life for our good and the good of his Church. Second, given the traditional conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans, the preaching of Phillip to their city has opened the door to the understanding that Jesus Christ is the savior of the whole world and not of one nation.

That is why by sending Peter and John to these new members, the apostles not only validated the evangelization done by the apostle Phillip, but they also recognized the truth that Jesus is the savior of anyone who believes in him. That validation was sanctioned by the prayer of Peter and John on the new coming and the imposition of the hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

This text teaches us equally something about the unity of the Church. In fact, the Church is the body of Christ; it is made up of peoples of different nations and different backgrounds. But, they are all one people in Jesus Christ. Even though new members can enter the Church through the work of evangelization, there is still one Church and one people. All should work together in communion of heart and mind, and keep a unity of teaching with the mother Church, as we see in the case of Peter and John who were sent from Jerusalem.

To believe in Jesus, to receive the Holy Spirit and to work together does not mean, however, necessarily being exempt from suffering or troubles. As St Peter says in the second reading, to be a disciple of Jesus is to follow in his footsteps and to accept sufferings as he did.

That is the challenge we all have, because suffering tends to make people become bitter, hateful and revengeful. Whatever might be our sufferings, indeed, we have always to sanctify Christ in our hearts and imitate him. For that reason, we have to suffer without seeking revenge, for it is better to suffer in doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil.

On the other hand, we should always be ready to give an explanation to anyone asking us a question about our faith in Jesus Christ. Here each one of us feels that he/she is compelled

to know more about the Christian faith in order to defend it against the unbelievers. To read and let ourselves being informed is a great witness we can bear to our faith.

In that perspective, we can say that today ignorance is not permitted. Gratuitous statements without sufficient knowledge and affirmations without valid arguments are not only null but also dangerous. It is a shame, however, that this is the mode some people have chosen to live by thinking by hear-say and by repeating unquestionably what was told them without discernment. This is the time of accountability for our faith. We have the right to know and to be informed.

Not that we want to display to others our knowledge or to be arrogant, but it is a duty we have to fulfill for the viability of our faith in Jesus Christ. Not that we have to be prideful of our knowledge, but rather we have to do everything with humility and modesty for the glory of God.

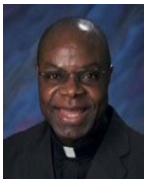
At the heart of everything we have to do, there is the love of Jesus. The love Jesus talks about in the Gospel has nothing to do with a sentimental emotion or feeling. It is all about obedience to him and his commandments. In fact, as Jesus showed his love by being obedient to his Father, so shall we show our love of Jesus by obeying him. That is why it is impossible to say that we love Jesus without keeping his commandments.

Of course, Jesus' love is not easy to live, as we know by experience. But, Jesus reassures us that he will not leave us orphans. He will send us another helper, that is, the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "Advocate", that is, someone called in order to help in time of need and trouble. In modern terms, we would say that the Holy Spirit is our lawyer who has to defend us and to tell the truth that can lead to our liberation. In that sense, the Holy Spirit takes away our inadequacies and enables us to cope with life in the footsteps of Jesus.

Although the Holy Spirit is important, the world does not accept him or know him. The world Jesus is talking about is all these people who live as though God does not exist. As they do not accept God, they do not accept anything related to him, including the Holy Spirit.

In order to change this unfortunate situation, they should obey Jesus as well as we, too, should love Jesus. However, there is no love of Jesus without observing his commandments. Moreover, given the intimate relationship that exists between Jesus and his Father, it follows that by loving Jesus, his Father will love us, too. Consequently, Jesus will reveal himself to us and live in us as he lives in his Father. We pray, then, that God may lead us to full obedience of Jesus by keeping his commandments. May God bless you all!

Acts 8, 5-8, 14-17; 1 Peter 3, 15-18; John 14, 15-21



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