

Pentecost Sunday
June 9, 2016
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Homily

When I was a seminarian, I was praying in the chapel. It came to me that "Sin the problem, and Jesus is the answer." As a proposition, it's pretty simple and makes sense. "Sin the problem, and Jesus is the answer." But the realization struck me deeply, in an unforgettable way. I can still see myself sitting in my pew when the thought occurred to me; a supernatural understanding. It came unprompted from out of nowhere. It was not only true, but really true; more real than reality itself. I wrote the words down somewhere, but it wasn't necessary. They were tattooed onto my soul. Years later, I heard the words again. Bishop Christian explained the kerygma to the priests at our annual retreat. The kerygma is the summary of the faith: "the irreducible essence of Christian apostolic preaching."¹ It goes like this: 1. God created the world for us to love him; 2. Sin is the problem; 3. Jesus is the answer; 4. Accept salvation; 5. Live new life. To this we can add another point: 6. Become missionary disciples. I had already received the second and third points as a supernatural understanding; a gift of the Holy Spirit; knowing profoundly something I had heard and already knew; seeing something familiar but illuminated by the light of ten thousand suns.

Acts 2:1-11

Ps 104

1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13 OR Rom 8:8-17

Jn 20:19-23 OR Jn 14:15-16, 23b-26

Hearing the bishop ratify these words let me know that I was on the right track; my supernatural understanding fit into the teaching of the Church; it was backed by episcopal authority. "Sin the problem, and Jesus is the answer."

In today's Gospel, Jesus says "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. He lets us understand what is required for our salvation. Sometimes, rarely, and not to everyone he gives supernatural understanding. But in general, the Holy Spirit uses ordinary means, which are charged with sufficient grace. Saying our prayers, reading the Bible, receiving the sacraments; doing good works; all these bring us closer to what Jesus said to the disciples. They work because the Holy Spirit gives us faith. It's like light. Just as light lets our eyes see the world, faith lets our mind know God - not just as creator - but with trust and love (St. Hilary, FrE7). For this reason, Paul tells the Corinthians, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."

The virtue of faith; the capacity to know God: these are intended for all. We get a sense of that in the first reading. The apostles spoke, and everyone understood.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kerygma>.

"Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own language?'" God wants all of us to understand. But the revelation wasn't received by everyone. "Others said, scoffing, 'They have had too much wine (Acts 2:13).'" Why did they reject it? St. Hilary says, "This unique gift which is in Christ is offered in its fullness to everyone. It is everywhere available, but it is given to each man in proportion to his readiness to receive it. Its presence is the fuller, the greater a man's desire to be worthy of it (St. Hilary, FrE7)." We need to want salvation. God makes us free, so it's up to us to accept or reject his wisdom and his love. What a risk he takes with each beloved soul!

But when the soul does accept what is offered, the person is remade: "the Spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell; he so transforms them that they begin to live a completely new kind of life (St. Cyril, ThE7)." St. Basil goes so far as this: "Through the Spirit we acquire a likeness to God; indeed, we attain what is beyond our most sublime aspirations - we become God (St. Basil, TuE7)." And the gifts that we receive are not for us alone, but for others; for the common good. The Spirit is fire that purifies us for service, the Spirit is light making us beacons in the night. For this Eucharist, we pray that we can use our gifts to help build the kingdom of God.