

Fourth Sunday of Easter B: April 21, 2024

*What have we been learning about the Lord Jesus?*

What have we been learning about the Lord since Easter? And, have we learnt more about the Apostles and, even, ourselves?

For instance, on the night before Jesus died, think about the quiet conversation between the Lord and the Apostles – listen to their words:

“‘Lord,’ Phillip said to Him, ‘show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.’ ‘Phillip,’ Jesus said unto him, ‘after having been with you so long, still you do not know Me? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say – Show us the Father? – Do you not know that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?’” (St. John 14. 8-10)

Jesus’ words to His Apostles are amazing, astonishing! If I were speaking to my little second-graders, those children who recently made their first Holy Communion last week, I would explain the words of Jesus very simply: Jesus shows us the human face of the Father.

What have we learned since Easter? Well, Last Sunday we heard about the Apostles, huddled in fear and then... suddenly Jesus appears in their midst. And when He appears, they are, very naturally, afraid. I hope you are not scandalized when I say ‘they are *very naturally afraid*.’ But, think for just a moment.

If you had just lost a loved one, especially having watched that loved one die in such tragic circumstances, and, now, three days later, *there He is, bright, shining, His wounds... full of light*, what would you think? I’m rather certain that if something like that happened to me two thoughts would be fighting in my mind and heart trying to gain the upper hand: one: either I am seeing a ghost (and what kid doesn’t *love* to hear a ghost story, even in church?), or two: in the stress of my grieving, my mind has given way, my psyche has snapped, I have lost my mind. In either event, the emotional result is the same: fear, terror, just as the Apostles experienced. And what did Jesus say to them?

*“Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at My hands and feet, that it is I, Myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”* (St. Luke 24. 38-39)

But then Jesus does something far more important to allay, to take away their fear. *He eats and drinks with them!* He says: *“‘Have you anything to eat?’ They gave Him a piece of baked fish; He took it and ate it in front of them.”* (24. 41-43)

And having eaten in front of them, then, and only then, *“... He opened their mind to understand the Scriptures.”* (24. 45)

Now do you see why it is that St. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, says to the assembled peoples in Jerusalem:

*“God raised up Jesus on the third day and granted that He be seen, not by all, but only by such witnesses as had been chosen beforehand by God – by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead?”* (Acts 10. 40-41)

So we have learned two very important things since the end of Lent: first, that Jesus is the human face of the Father, pointed toward us; and, secondly, that we must eat and drink with the Lord, in Holy Communion, to truly hear His word and see Him.

What else can we learn today? One last very simple lesson, I think. This Jesus, Who is the gentle face of the Father, is a shepherd, the *Good Shepherd* Who *“lays down His life*

*for the sheep.” (St. John 10. 11) Is that not what He did when He died on the Cross for us, did He not lay down His life for His sheep? And, He goes on to explain: “This is why the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down on My own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from My Father.” (St. John 10. 17-18)*

These words of Jesus – that “*He has the power to lay down His life and take it up again*” – are words we should ponder in our hearts. The image of the Shepherd was an image well-known to the Jewish people, if not so well-known to us. As Mons. Sheen points out:

The prophets... often spoke of the shepherds who preserved a flock in good pastures as distinct from false shepherds. God is depicted by Isaias as carrying His sheep in His arms, and by Ezekiel as a shepherd looking for His lost sheep... Best known is Psalm 23 where the Lord is pictured as leading His sheep into green pastures... The shepherd-patriarch Jacob and the shepherd-king David now pass into the Shepherd-Savior, as the staff becomes a crook, the crook a sceptre, and the sceptre a Cross. (1)

Our Lady has spoken words to us, in Her messages given to the children at Medjugorje which address the power of the Cross and our prayers at the foot of the Cross which can be helpful: “During these days when you joyfully celebrate the feast of the Cross, I wish that your own Cross become a source of joy. Especially, dear children, pray in order to be able to accept sickness and sufferings with love as Jesus did. It is only in this way that I can experience the joy of giving you the graces and the cures which Jesus permits me to grant you... Meditate on the Passion of Jesus.” This is a difficult teaching, I know. It requires the ability to let Jesus guide us, to be our Shepherd, our good Shepherd both in times that are happy, and, as Psalm 23 says, in the “dark valleys.” If we do this, however, with the help of Mary Immaculate, then, as Mon. Sheen says, the staff of the Shepherd becomes a “crook, the crook a sceptre, and the sceptre a Cross.”

And so, finally, what have we learned during Lent and Easter? Perhaps it is more about what we have *remembered*. “*The Lord is my Shepherd...*” and the Cross is our salvation, our only salvation, because, as St. Paul reminds us “*We preach Christ, and Him crucified.*” (1 Cor. 1. 23)

1. His Grace, Mons. F. J. Sheen, *Life of Christ*, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1958, pg. 198