

A Breath of Life from the Wilderness – 105 – 4th Sunday of Easter B

V. Christ is risen, alleluia! R. He is truly risen, alleluia!

Good morning, sisters and brothers of our Lord Jesus Christ! Good morning children of the heavenly Father! Good morning, children of Mary, the Mother of God!

Are you happy? Are you having fun? Are you satisfied?

Wait a minute; are those the right questions to ask? Or should I be asking other questions? Let's consult the person in this room with the most experience. Fr. Murray, what questions do you like to ask people? Have you been a good boy? Have you been a good girl? Are you doing a good job? You're not driving too fast, now, are you?

So what's going on here? Pope Francis has just written us a new Apostolic Exhortation titled "Gaudete et exsultate" or in English "Rejoice and be glad." The titles of these papal documents always comes from the first words or first line, and this one comes from a teaching Jesus gave on the mountain and it's commonly called the "Beatitudes". Jesus exhorts us to "rejoice and be glad" when people persecute us, calumniate us, or otherwise treat us badly for doing good and trying to do the will of God; for our reward will be great in heaven.

Pope Francis declares very clearly and simply that his purpose is to exhort us to embrace our vocation as Christians to become holy by the manner and activity of our lives. All too often, he says, we have been put off from even thinking about becoming a saint because we find that it would be impossible for us to imitate the example of the great saints. Pope Francis bluntly tells us not even to think of imitating the great saints.

We're not supposed to imitate them, because God is giving each of us the great gift of a life that is unique and unrepeatable. That means that each of us is called to be a unique saint in the manner in which we choose to live our lives and in the way in which we engage in activities that we choose in order to do the will of God here on Earth for as long as we have a life here.

Today is the 4th Sunday of Easter. It has long been called "Good Shepherd Sunday" on account of the way Jesus presents himself to us as our Good Shepherd. So what is our Good Shepherd telling us? Where is our Good Shepherd leading us? What vocation is Jesus giving to each of us, at this particular point in our lives? What is Jesus calling me to do with my life?

There are two voices calling out to us each day and all day long. One voice demands that I satisfy all my desires; while the other voice invites me to love, even when it is difficult to love. The voice that asks me "Are you happy yet? Don't you want that?" is the voice of advertising. It is actually many voices, all from hell, for our whole lives brainwashing us into thinking of ourselves as consumers. We are happy consumers or disgruntled consumers or complaining consumers... but this is primarily what those voices want us to be – they want us to understand ourselves to be, first and foremost, consumers. For the consumer, the only reason to come to church would be in answer to the question: "What will I get if I go to church?"

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The consumer will only come to church if there is something to gain and if there are no obstacles to make it difficult. That is very different from St Peter and the Apostles who after the resurrection of Jesus were boldly proclaiming that Jesus is the promised Saviour of the world even when the religious authorities wanted to punish them for doing that. In the face of this opposition and persecution, the apostles were actually joyful, not happy, but joyful.

If we only realized what it means that at our Baptism we became children of God and a whole new life began for us on that day, we would now see ourselves as children of God the Father in heaven, and sisters and brothers of Jesus here on Earth. No matter what happens to us each day, good or bad, just by remembering that God loves us like a Father and that we are his children would constantly fill us with joy. In fact, trouble would only remind us in a bad way that we are children of God and that we have a rich inheritance waiting for us; so even trouble would increase our joy. On the other hand, to the degree we buy into being a consumer; then to that degree will we be miserable, because consuming will never satisfy us completely.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd and He is leading us to live a life like his. Jesus calls us to love as He does, to forgive as He does, and to live our lives in such a way as to show other people that it is true that God loves us. We aren't alive to be consumers. We are alive to be loved by God and to share that love with others, even when others are irritating or troubling.

Are we able to become saints by our manner of living? No, not on our own. The only way we can become saints is with God living inside of us. That is why Jesus invented this incredible sacrament of Holy Communion. This is why Jesus wants to give us his own life to be our food for our journey on Earth. We don't need to understand how Holy Communion works in order for it to be real. All of the most wonderful and precious realities in life are mysterious because we cannot fully understand them: even life itself, love, forgiveness, peace, and so on....

The good news is that what Jesus our Good Shepherd asks us to do is to offer Him our weakness; so that He can manifest all his power as God through our weakness in all the many situations of our lives. Then it will be obvious to everyone that it wasn't me who did or said that, because it was God. This is how saints give glory to God in the eyes of others. The saints let Jesus give them his life in Holy Communion to strengthen them, and this is why Jesus calls us, among other things, to gather together in his name on Sunday for the Holy Mass.

I encourage you to read Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation "Rejoice and be glad!" Anyone with Internet can get it for free from the Vatican website. If not, please call the Office and we'll help. Don't worry, most of it is in language easy to understand and not technical theological language. When he does use big words, he finds a way to make it understandable for all of us. I believe we are already living much of our lives in ways that are making us saints. Pope Francis gives many simple examples of this. When I offer someone a smile, when I offer to help a person in need, when I hold back anger and inside pray for an irritating person in front of me, when I forgive someone who is hurting me even when they are not sorry, and so on.... V.