

4th Sunday of Easter / First Holy Communion
3 May 2009
Sacred Heart of Jesus

What is the central proclamation of Easter? What have we been hearing over and over in different ways these 4 Sundays of Easter? The central message of Easter is: “Having died on the cross, Jesus ROSE on the 3rd day!”

We hear this over and over all throughout Easter – not to BORE us, but to ASSURE us of this fundamental Truth of our faith – Jesus is TRULY alive!

But some rejected him – why is Peter on trial in today’s 1st reading? Because he is teaching that Jesus is risen from the dead – and that makes the Jewish leaders angry. Not only is he teaching this, but in Jesus’ name he is performing miracles – quite a convincing way to assure people that Jesus is really the Messiah.

Why do the leaders reject this truth – even when it is so obvious? They reject Jesus because they refuse to accept Jesus’ power over their lives – THEY are in control – and they are going to STAY in control – “stop teaching about that man,” the Pharisees told St. Peter. But he didn’t stop – but started performing miracles to PROVE that Jesus has power over our lives – over sin and illness and even death itself. Jesus is really alive! It is Peter’s proclamation – and it is the same proclamation of the Church today – Jesus is alive!

But even TODAY, people continue to reject Jesus for the same reasons that the Pharisees did – they don’t want to acknowledge that Jesus has power over their lives. “Don’t tell me what to do!” they tell the Church – don’t dictate my morality – I will decide what I want to do. Still today, many people fail to recognize the truth of what St. Peter taught: “Jesus is the stone rejected by the builders that has become the cornerstone.” This stone that the Pharisees rejected is now the cornerstone of our lives! Without a cornerstone, the whole thing falls over because there is nothing to support it – to help it stand up on its own.

Guess what? God – Jesus is our cornerstone – HE is the one who holds us together, He is the one who keeps us from falling over – He is the one who stabilizes our lives. But, why doesn’t the entire world recognize this? Can’t we see that things are falling apart? Why don’t we see it?

The reason is because WE don't live who we really are – God's children. If we want the world to come to know Christ – WE have to live as true children of God. “We are God's children now” St. John told us in the 2nd reading. The reason the world does not know us as God's children is because we don't live as if we are His children.

Children and parents have a very close bond and identification – how many times growing up I heard, “Well, aren't you Bruce Bateman's boy?” Even today I hear that from time to time (although now-a-days it's dad who hears, “Aren't you Fr. Bateman's dad?” – that's a nice switch ☺)

Kids – you know your parents' voice, don't you? You even know from the tone of voice if you're in trouble – or if this is something good. You know their voice – when you're out with all your friends and someone's mom comes out and yells – you can tell when it's your mom, can't you? You can pick your parents voices out of all the other voices around you (although sometimes you *ignore* that voice – but you hear it – don't you? ☺). Children – smart children – not only hear their parent's voice – but they follow it – they follow the advice that voice gives to them – this is when you obey your parents – and, later in life, you take their advice seriously and follow the direction they point out to you. Children know their parent's voice – and they follow it!

Parents, you know your child's voice, too – don't you? You can be in a crowded mall or at the Embassy festival or something – and you hear a voice calling – SCREAMING – MOM!!! And you know IMMEDIATELY if that is your child or someone else's... You KNOW your child's voice and can pick it out of a crowd. You, as parents, are willing to give and sacrifice EVERYTHING for your children. You give them good advice – you provide them with good example – you try to “steer them in the right direction.” You KNOW how important your example is – but don't FORGET how important your example is. You are sacrificing all KINDS of things for your kids – to allow them to have everything they need – but their GREATEST need is not baseball or ballet, their GREATEST need is God. Parents, NEVER fail to recognize the sacrifices you are called to make for your children to help bring them to GOD.

[at first communion ONLY...]

Think about what they are doing today – they are receiving [received] the very Body and Blood of Christ for the first time in Holy Communion – we all remember that special day as if it was yesterday... Your kids have been SO EXCITED – not just [yesterday] today, but probably all week! All the preparations – the suits and dresses, the family coming in from out of town, the party later... SO MUCH for this SPECIAL Day – when you first receive Jesus in Holy Communion. Now, parents, DON'T fail me!!! Don't forget that your children need YOU to help them continue coming to Mass to receive Jesus in Holy Communion – they can't get here without you! But if you allow baseball and ballet, if you allow shopping or sleeping in to take priority – you are leading your children down the WRONG path...

[continue with all...]

You want what is BEST for your children – doesn't it drive you CRAZY when they don't listen to your advice? Doesn't it hurt you when they ignore your voice and do their own thing? Isn't it painful when they don't answer your call – when they don't follow your voice?

Guess what, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who is calling US to follow His voice – but sometimes, just like our kids, we don't recognize His voice and follow Him. Just as that hurts us when our children do it – so it hurts God – who only wants the BEST for all of us... And what is that BEST that He wants for each of us? For us to be happy – God has chosen something for each of us – He has chosen a particular way of life for each one of us [for each one of you, my first communicants] – He is calling every one of us in church today to follow His example – to give our lives (as He did on the cross) by following His voice as he calls us to a particular vocation – whether that be as a married man or woman – as a single person – or as a consecrated religious sister or even a priest!

Celebrating 1st communion this weekend in our parishes got me thinking about my own first communion – MANY years ago. I remember how excited I was – I remember how nervous I was. I remember kneeling in the pew – and remember that Sister Corde Marie had told us to keep our hands folded, to sit up straight, to not touch my neighbor – all the things I heard at practice on Thursday night ✍ I remember how SPECIAL it was as Communion-time came and I walked up the aisle toward Father, as he held up the Sacred Host and said, “The Body of Christ.” I felt like the most special person – that Jesus had given

me HIMSELF as food – to help me in this life. I can probably trace the beginnings of my own vocation to the day of my First Holy Communion.

Maybe, recalling all of our First Communions [or receiving your first communion today], you'll find that your vocation began there – as you received Jesus – as you recall how He died on the Cross for you – and gave us the Eucharist for our strength and nourishment – maybe you'll be reminded how YOU are called to be a gift to others – whether as a priest or consecrated religious, as a wife or husband, or as a single person – for our young people, this has “not yet been revealed.” But there are several things we DO all know:

- ✍ That we are God's children
- ✍ That Jesus is TRULY risen – that He is alive
- ✍ And that we, in our lives, must LIVE as God's children – listening to His voice, and following wherever His voice may lead us.