

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

April 25-26, 2015

Readings: Acts 4: 8-12; 1 John 3:1-2; John 10:11-18

“Put up your dukes. Dem’s fightin’ words.” That phrase takes me back to my days of watching Yosemite Sam, the archenemy of Bugs Bunny, making trouble once again on the Saturday morning Looney Tunes Cartoons. Of course, no one got hurt in those squabbles– it was just a cartoon. But in reality “fightin’ words” abound all around us these days. It is becoming more apparent that whenever we make truth claims today, we run the risk of offending someone or some group.

So now picture yourself delivering today’s speech to the Sanhedrin in our first reading. St. Peter said: He is *the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone*. Can you imagine the response on their faces after St. Peter excoriated them? “Dem’s fightin’ words,” and then some! There is no question that these were bold words, and that they put the very well-being of Peter in some jeopardy. He spoke the truth to power, and they were not happy to say the least.

The Acts of the Apostles gives us a marvelous glimpse into the life of the early Church. Whatever some might say about the weakness of the apostles, and the fact that all but one they abandoned Jesus at the foot of the Cross, it is equally true that after the resurrection they boldly spent themselves for the Gospel and we see evidence of tremendous courage in Saint Peter today.

I did not choose to be a priest in order to make people uncomfortable or to stand in judgment over anyone. I chose a priestly vocation in order to share the saving truths of our faith. The Scriptures remind us that we need to preach the Gospel in season and out, and I have certainly seen the truth in those words.

Saint Peter is giving voice to a saving truth about Jesus Christ that to some modern ears is downright heresy. He makes a truth claim for the universal salvific role of Jesus Christ. He states quite clearly: “There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

It must therefore be *firmly believed* as a truth of Catholic faith that the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God.<sup>1</sup>

This is our faith, and we ought neither to be haughty about our convictions, nor ought we to apologize for them. To some, our Christian conviction is the height of arrogance. By our actions, we must demonstrate that this is not at all the case. Far from it.

The means by which Jesus continues to be made known is through his instrument, namely the Church. According to our faith, it is equally true that God’s universal desire for all to be saved, and that God allows His grace to work outside the visible bounds of the Church. With the coming of the Savior Jesus Christ, God has willed that the Church founded by him be the instrument for the salvation of *all* humanity (cf. Acts 17:30-31).<sup>2</sup>

Exactly how this possible salvation occurs outside the visible bounds of the Church, the Second Vatican Council limited itself to the statement that God bestows it “in ways known to himself.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, it is a mystery and we do not pretend to know all the details, for they are beyond us. It is part of the great mystery of life.

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, III, 14. 6 August 2000

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., *Dominus Iesus*, III, 22 cf. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 17; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., *Dominus Iesus*, III, 21, quoting Second Vatican Council, Decree *Ad gentes*, 7.

The Church is juggling two seemingly competing ideas, but ones that can be held in dynamic tension, namely God's universal desire for all to be saved, as well as the unique and irreplaceable role played by Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World.

In an increasingly divided world, there is no burning desire to prove anyone else as wrong, Christians harbor no sense of "one upmanship." Rather, we are motivated out of a burning conviction that Jesus Christ rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, having conquered once and for all the reign of sin in the world. We are called to give witnesses to this joyous message of peace and hope in a world so desperately in need of it.

Today in a very special way, we pray for all the people affected by the horrific and tragic earthquake in Nepal. Untold damage has been done, with significant loss of life, growing by the hour. May God hold the Nepalese people in the palm of his hand and may the international community offer assistance to help them recover and rebuild. Above all, may they not lose hope in God in this terrible time of suffering.