

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Easter Year “C”

April 28, 2013

Readings: Acts 14: 21-27; Rev. 21:1-5; John 13: 31-35

Names and places from the past...how is it that they can come back both to haunt us and comfort us? Certain songs can bring us back to a very particular time and place and circumstance in our lives. Can we not picture ourselves in a particular place- a car, a dance floor, at an important event that brings the past back in an instant? Such is the power of time, place and people.

Similarly, is it not the case that what might be important to people at a particular time and place seems less so to us for any number of reasons? Far from diminishing someone’s history, we honor it, while even acknowledging that it may not be part of our history. What is timely may not be bound by time...

I mention this by way of introduction because our first reading throughout the Easter season has been from the Acts of the Apostles. We do not read from the Old Testament during this season. Acts has always been one of the more interesting books of the Bible for me personally because I am partial to facts, to geography and things concrete. Acts has all those aspects and much more. I readily acknowledge that many of the details contained therein are of less obvious value to the Christian of the 21<sup>st</sup> century because much of its history has become clouded and obscured over time. Yet, therein lies an important lesson too.

These regions such as Pisidia and Pamphilia, and place names like Perga , Lystra and Iconium mean little or nothing to any of us in 2013. The names cannot be found in my National Geographic Atlas- they are distant memories. Our culture prides itself on efficiency over history. Why do anything the “old-fashioned way” if a more efficient way can be found?

I remember quite vividly that while in a high school class I took over 30 years ago, a classmate with a bit of a chip on his shoulder, asked the teacher who was making an historical point- “Can you tell me how any of this is this going to help me get a job?” You see, unless there was a perceived direct application of the knowledge conveyed, it was thoroughly useless to him. This is a utilitarian approach. How can this benefit me to the highest possible degree right now? Some today would ask- “What do all these places and names have to do with my faith here and now?”

The utilitarian approach, prevalent though it may be, presents a special challenge to those who work in Church ministry. Once, while leading a Confirmation Retreat, one student shuffled in late, sat down and then immediately raised his hand- “How long will we be here?” I wonder if that same question would have been asked if he had been given tickets to a concert of his favorite group?

St. Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, is relating the activities of the first Missionary journey, and this journey was of profound importance in the life of the Church. It represented a real turning point as the Gospel was preached far and wide. The account provides us with important information about the zeal, the hardships, and the growing pains of being apostles of the Lord. In addition to the hardships, both physical and spiritual, there were disagreements over what would be the best approach to take.

Yet, in all this, it was equally important to reflect on one’s successes. We read in Acts: “From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now accomplished.” So ended the first missionary journey of the apostle Paul, a journey of some 2100 miles over a period of two years (47-49 AD). Close to 10,000 miles would be covered later on at the end of all the missionary journeys.

Paul and Barnabas are giving an account of themselves– an “End of the Year Report”– about how the Lord had worked in their lives and in the lives of those to whom they spread the Word. Acts uses the language of “**opening the door of faith**” to the Gentiles. That is indeed an apt image of faith, that of opening doors, and we recall the image of an increasingly frail Bl. Pope John Paul II entering the Holy Door on the threshold of the new millenium.

In some respects, we are merely the doorkeepers, period. We open the door, but we cannot take people with us, at least not against their will. The Church proposes, the Church invites. The Church teaches and does so authoritatively, as is her mission. Yet, even in that, she does **not** impose, she does not coerce. We, following the lead of the Lord, respect the tremendous gift of free will bestowed on us by our Creator.

We believe that the saving message of Christ will ultimately wipe away our tears, though it is not a guarantee of protection against tears. Jesus Christ, who will make all things new, while at the same time allowing us to wallow in what is old, so should we choose. The task of those who minister in Christ’s name is to throw wide open the doors, to reveal the light that dwells therein.

Jesus told the disciples in today’s Gospel that he would be with them only a little while longer. It was indeed wise of him give fair warning of his impending departure, lest they fail to cherish every last moment, every last word of encouragement. It is as if Jesus is begging them to value the moment, to live in the present, even with an eye to the future. Today, right in the here and now, we can abide in God’s love, we can share and spread the Good News, and we can show gratitude for His blessings in our lives. The Easter season isn’t over yet. Let us rejoice and be glad.