

Sixth Sunday of Easter Year A

Readings

Acts 8:5-8,14-17

1 Peter 3:15-18

John 14:15-21

Earlier this week, we celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima. This feast celebrates events that began 103 years ago on 13 May 1917, when our Lady appeared to three shepherd children in an obscure village in Portugal. The apparitions of our Lady, which ended on 13 October of that year, included a terrifying vision of Hell, a call to penance for the sins of the world, and the famous third part of the secret entrusted to the children, revealing the continuing slow martyrdom of the Church from its highest levels down.

But while there is much in the content of the message of Fatima that is sobering, and indeed downright frightening, there is, at its heart, this one, supremely consoling message of hope: “My Immaculate Heart will triumph”.

This message is a message of victory. But there can be no victory without a battle preceding it. While Hell is real and terrifying, the Devil has been defeated. The only thing left to him is to attempt to lure the unrepentant into his grasp. Our Lady, however, the one who stood at the foot of the Cross, puts Satan to flight and prays unceasingly as Mother of the Church for us poor sinners on our earthly pilgrimage to our Heavenly Father.

This message of hope lies at the heart of our readings today: “Always be prepared to make your defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” (1 Peter 3:15-16)

Of the three theological virtues, faith, hope and charity, hope is often the most neglected; the shy younger sister if you will. We know from St Paul that the greatest is charity but we must never neglect hope. They are called theological virtues because they are directly rooted in God and they form Christians in such a way as to bring them into closer union with the Holy Trinity. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1812)

Hope is all about keeping our eyes fixed on God. He made us – more, he made us for happiness, he made us for blessedness, for an eternity in His presence, for the conviviality and joy of Heaven. Hope is a seed planted by God himself and it flourishes best when we live in the light of God’s promises: redemption for the sinner, new life in Christ, heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven, eternal life and a share in his holiness. It is a hope that does not disappoint and it enables us to persevere to the end.

At a time when so many of us are enduring a Eucharistic fast that has lasted many weeks now, and when we are deprived of the everyday consolations of living our faith as have been used to doing for so long, we need that virtue of hope: these things will pass, the troubles of life and of the present moment are transitory. God’s promises

are sure, and rock solid.

Today Jesus promises us that we will not be left as orphans. Though He will return – His redemptive mission accomplished – to his Father in Heaven, the Spirit of Truth will come and remain for ever. It is the Spirit of Truth and to those who love Jesus and keep his commandments, the Spirit is the gift that will never fail: it anchors us in hope, it will deepen faith and enkindle charity. In the Acts of the Apostles, which we have been reading during the course of Eastertide, we see how the Spirit invigorates the mission of the Church, empowering the Apostles and adding to the number of those who follow Christ. The hope that animates and shapes the lives of the early Christians springs out of every page. It enabled Paul to endure beating, persecution, shipwreck and imprisonment; it enabled Stephen to forgive his murderers; it enabled Peter to rise above earlier failure and to govern and guide the Church.

And all this for a very simple reason: they put their trust in a living God. As we know, many of the first Christians came from the lower social classes. In Jesus Christ, Risen and Glorified, who died the death of the lowest criminal, the humble and lowly were lifted up and the mighty cast down. But this new Life also brought converts from all parts of the social spectrum. They too were animated by hope and a desire to live God's commandments in love.

So today, the sixth Sunday of Easter and the Ninth Sunday of Lockdown-tide, we remember the message of hope. The Spirit enables us to see beyond the difficulties of this time, so let us entrust ourselves to Mary, in the Triumph of Her Immaculate Heart. She remains in the our midst as our Mother; she points us to Her Son, the source of our hope, and teaches us to believe in Him and to love Him. May she pray for us now, that we may doubt no longer, but believe.