

Easter 6 Homily

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17, 1 Peter 3:15-18, John 14:15-21

Growth in the power of the Spirit.

During this Easter season we have had a lot of readings from the Acts of the Apostles. It is a book, probably written by Luke that tells of the growth and spread of the early church. There are two key figures within it – Peter and to a greater extent Paul although many of the disciples and early saints are included as Phillip and John are today. It is a story of journey both physically and spiritually. In these last two months of our crisis I suspect many of you have not journeyed far and will not be doing so in the foreseeable future. But has there been a spiritual journeying? Sometimes journeys are tiring dangerous unchosen and to be endured and yet such journeys can also be sources of growth especially when we reflect upon them the other side. We are not on the other side of this crisis yet and so you have my deepest empathy if you are finding things more enduring than fulfilling at the moment.

Although termed Acts of the Apostles the book is perhaps better called Acts of the Holy Spirit. This coming week we will celebrate Ascension Day when the earthly appearances of the risen Jesus come to an end and we acknowledge that Jesus Christ is in heaven – no longer restricted to a particular place and time and people but all places times and all people. One of the enduring themes of Acts is how the Gospel comes to not only to Jewish believers but Greek and all kinds of gentiles and this too requires a journeying and change of mind-set for the apostles. It is the evidence of change for good in peoples' lives that calls other. The Apostles care heal forgive and preach in ways that cause Jesus to come alive for more and more people.

Life was often short and brutish in the days of the Apostles and yet they are people of hope as we are called to be in our time. In Peter we are rightly reminded to always have an account of our hope - a reason. It is how the living Lord Christ Jesus himself has the power to change and bring hope.

Jesus in his earthly life knew that loneliness and isolation after his death would be hard for the disciples. However we must not forget how hard it was for them with him around physically. During his physical presence

they had been at times, unbelieving, denying and betraying and yet in these “farewell discourses” of John we see the depth of Jesus’s love for them. Jesus’s promise of the Spirit – comforter and advocate – will enable them to grow in a way they could not before his death resurrection and ascension.

Comforting is not just about consoling and soothing though it does include that, think of how at a time of tragedy it helps to just be with someone – they do not change the facts but bring strength to live and deal with them. This brings us to the other side of the word comforter - encouraging. In the Bayeux tapestry William the conqueror is seen comforting his troops with the point of his sword. It is the sort of encouragement that helps us to make those tiring dangerous unchosen to be endured journeys that we do not want but perhaps are called to undertake.

The other key word is advocate, like someone who stands up and defends us in court or an assembly. Yes Peter says always have your answer ready but it is the spirit within that makes the difference. As St.Paul says – evidenced by the experience of his arduous physical and spiritual journeying:

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

The language of Jesus in the gospel is deeply Trinitarian showing a perfect communion between father son and spirit. His earthly Journey has ended the disciples has yet to truly begin – both have the same end and goal. They will see Jesus in a different way, their knowledge of the man who walked their early journey with them will be transfigured as their own lives will be. Wherever they go the words of Jesus: “because I live you will live” will go with them and his spirit will give them comfort and strength. May it be no less for us as we seek to journey in faith and grow in the power of the Spirit. Amen.