

HOMILY for 5th SUNDAY of EASTER – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel talks about the wonderful works of Jesus and calls us to do the same. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you. The nearest customer was five stools away, but that didn't keep Josh from leaning over toward the bartender & commenting, "Geez, there's a lousy smell in here." A few minutes later he added, "It smells just like... manure." Puzzled by the origin of the stench, he moved closer to the other customer, & sure enough the smell worsened. "Phew, you really stink," he pointed out.

"I know," said the man apologetically. "It's because of my job." Seeing that Josh was interested in a further explanation, he went on, "I'm with an elephant act, & before each show I have to give the elephant an enema so he doesn't take a dump during the performance. Frankly, it's a tricky business, because I have to administer it quickly & then jump back. And sometimes I just don't move fast enough."

"OMG," commiserated Josh, shaking his head. "How much do they pay you for this lousy job?"

"Eighty-five bucks a week," said the man cheerfully.

"You've got to be kidding. Why don't you quit?"

"What?" retorted the man, "and get out of show business?!"

Anyhow, if there is one word that Jesus used quite often during His ministry, it would be "Faith." Before He healed someone, Jesus would usually ask His patient, "Do you believe that I could do this?" Or, after He did a miracle for someone, Jesus often reaffirmed one's faith in Him by saying, "Your faith has saved you." As far as Jesus is concerned, faith shows one's trust in Him & one's desire to have a relationship with the spiritual world. If we do not have any faith in Jesus, we should not expect any miracle to happen.

In case we somehow have not understood the importance of faith in our relationship with Jesus, this Sunday's Gospel has this message for us, "Jesus said to His disciples: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God & faith also in me. In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places; otherwise, how could I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you?... Then I shall come back to take you with me, that where I am you also may be.'" Jesus seemed to remind His disciples that His departure for Heaven cause them some sadness & anxieties. But, He called on them to keep their faith in Him & in God alive. He reminded them that He simply went home to prepare a place for them in Heaven/His Father's house. He asked them to keep doing His works & carry on His mission of salvation.

Besides asking us to have faith in Him, Jesus calls on us to do His works & carry on His mission of salvation as being described in today's Gospel this way: "...Believe me that I am in the Father & the Father is in me, or else because of the works I do. I solemnly assure you, anyone who has faith in me will do the works that I do, & far greater than these." As you can see, Jesus did not only beg us to have faith in Him because of His identity & His works but also challenge us to continue His wonderful works and make Him proud by doing far greater things than His.

Over the years, critics have debated about Jesus' identity & His wonderful works. They have questioned whether Jesus was truly God & human. Some said that Jesus was all divine while others argued that He was all human. People who thought that Jesus was all divine believed that He simply put on the human form & could not really feel our human pains or emotions. He was a robot that looked like human. Meanwhile, people who thought that Jesus

was all human believed that He was simply gifted with oratory skill & ability to perform magic for the miraculous works. Other than that, He was human like the rest of us. However, the official belief & teaching of the Church is that Jesus is both divine & human; which is His true identity. Jesus calls on His disciples to believe in Him not only because of His identity but also His wonderful works. As you might recall, Jesus did all sorts of great works for the people of God during His ministry. He drove out evil spirits from the possessed. He healed people from all kinds of afflictions & restored them to a new life. He also fed the hungry. Those are some of the wonderful works of Jesus; & He wanted His disciples to continue His works & do far greater things than those to make Him proud.

In case any Christian has any doubt about the wonderful works of Jesus & His call on His disciples to continue those, today's First Reading tells us how the early Church carried out His wishes as following: "In those days, as the number of disciples grew, the ones who spoke Greek complained that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food, as compared with the widows of those who spoke Hebrew. The Twelve assembled the community of the disciples & said, 'It is not right for us to neglect the word of God in order to wait on the tables. Look around among your own number for seven men acknowledged to be deeply spiritual & prudent, & we shall appoint them to this task.'" The task of feeding the poor & taking care of the daily necessities for the widows was later assigned to deacons and deaconesses.

Unfortunately, over the years the Church has got involved in politics & neglected that important task & other wonderful works of Jesus. Worst yet, some Christians have often quoted only part of Paul's teachings & claimed that they have been saved by the Cross of Christ & refused to do any wonderful works of Jesus. What these folks left out was that Paul also said, "Faith without works is like an empty gong." In other words, we could claim to believe in Jesus all we want, but do not practice it by doing the wonderful works of Jesus; that faith is empty & useless like the sound of a gong. That is why the Catholic Church has insisted that faith & work have to go hand in hand & keep a check & balance on each other. A good Catholic/Christian cannot claim to have a strong faith in Jesus without doing His wonderful works. Otherwise, the person is simply fooling oneself. Or, Jesus once said, "You cannot just say, 'Lord, Lord' & expect to enter Heaven." That is why the best Christian way of life is the one of a missionary. A missionary does not only pray & believe in Jesus but also try to practice the wonderful works of Jesus every day. A missionary should be our role model & hero. His/her way of life must be the inspiring example for us to imitate & practice daily. That way we could draw a lot of non-believers closer to Jesus & our Catholic faith. Besides, can we convert someone to our Catholic faith without showing him/her some acts of charity?

My dear brothers & sisters, this Sunday Jesus calls us to keep putting our faith in Him as He returns to God the Father. If we have faith in Jesus, we must continue His works & carry on the mission of salvation that He left behind for us. We cannot claim ourselves to be a Christian/Catholic & then refuse to do the wonderful works of Jesus such as driving out evil spirits, healing the afflicted, & feeding the hungry. When we joyfully do those corporal works of mercy, we make our faith alive & keep Jesus ever present in our world. So, don't just say that you are a Catholic/Christian or claim to have faith in Jesus & then do none of the wonderful works of Jesus. Show that faith in action & continue doing the wonderful works of Jesus every day.