

We continue this week with the Easter season. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is at the very core of our faith and rightly does the Catholic Church celebrate this Mystery for 50 days. The Easter season formerly ends on the feast of Pentecost when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and the founding of the Catholic Church. (Acts of the Apostles 2)

In the readings today for the fourth Sunday of Easter, we see Paul and Barnabas sharing the good news of Jesus's resurrection and his teaching to the Jewish people in Antioch in Pisidia. As the passage tells us, many Jews and worshipers who were converts to Judaism accepted the good news of Jesus. And then something amazing happened. On the following Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear Paul and Barnabas. This indicates that their message was really touching the hearts and souls of many people. But unfortunately some Jews were filled with jealousy about the fact that almost the whole city gathered to hear the preaching of Paul and Barnabas. These Jews began to contradict

Paul and his preaching and so Paul made a very important statement. He said it was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first (that is, the Jews) but since you rejected it and judge yourselves as unworthy of eternal life we now turn to the Gentiles.

How sad that the jealousy of these Jews prevented them from being open to the good news of Jesus's resurrection. How sad it is when anyone closes their hearts to the good news of Jesus' victory over sin and death. How sad when anyone ignores the clear teachings of Jesus and the new life He brings, and clings to their own ideas about life which will prove in the end to be empty and hollow. But God cannot be stopped and so Paul and Barnabas proceeded to continue to preach to the Gentiles until finally they were expelled from that territory because of the hostility some Jews and others had stirred up. And Paul and Barnabas simply did what God does when anyone rejects his message. Paul and Barnabas simply went elsewhere to other people . No one can stop the word of God from spreading to where God wants it to Spread. And when received, the Word of God changes lives.

The second reading from the **Book of Revelation** reminds us that all the souls in heaven, a great multitude of people, wear white robes and hold palm branches of victory in their hands. These are signs of victory over evil. They are victorious because they had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb. This means that they washed their souls clean of sin through the blood of the lamb, Jesus Christ. This blood of the lamb reference refers to baptism and confession, two sacraments that cleanse the soul from sin. And the same Saints offer God glory and praise in the kingdom as they stand around his throne and they receive the life-giving water of the Holy Spirit that feeds their souls and brings joy to their hearts. There is no weeping in heaven. We look forward to joining them one day.

Finally in the Gospel we hear that Jesus is our shepherd and leads us in the ways of truth and eternal life. In the Gospel Jesus says something that we need to deeply ponder. This may not even be noticed by many Christians. It is the statement of Jesus that God our Father has given each of us to Jesus so we can be his

sheep. This is amazing. We are given by God the Father to Jesus the son. Have you ever thought about that? You and I are a gift of God the father to Jesus. This is amazing! How can this be?

Brothers and sisters what this tells us is that we truly are the adopted sons and daughters of God the father and when we were baptized God the father claimed us as his sons and daughters and Jesus became our shepherd and our brother. And Jesus is the best friend you and I could ever have. He will always tell us the truth and he will guide us on the pathway to heaven. If we ever go astray, he will warn us through his church or his close friends so that we get back on the path.

I am reminded of two stories about friends. Friends are important because they are central to our experience of life, to our experience as human beings.

The first story goes like this. There are two guys who are off camping and hiking in the woods one day when all of a sudden they come up on a bear and it's a big bear. The bear sees them out of the corner of his eyes and he turns around and squares off with

these guys and begins to roar. The guys get scared and they know what they should do. They know they should curl up in a ball and play dead on the ground. But they do what most people do, they run for their lives. These two guys they turn around and they just begin to bolt out of there. What happens is that the bear begins to chase them. However, after about 10 yards one guy stops. He takes off his backpack and takes off his camping boots, his hiking boots, and he puts on his running shoes. His friend turns around and he says, "What are you doing? You're not going to outrun the bear." The other guy says, "I don't have to out run the bear, I just have to out run you." This guy used his friend as bear bait? If you have friends, do your friends use you as a bear bait? If so, they're not interested in what's best for you. They're only interested in themselves. Because let's face it, true friends have our best interest at heart.

Let me tell you another story. A teenager in Milwaukee gets diagnosed with cancer. In and out of the hospital for two months, Had operations, and treatments and chemo and radiation. And he goes bald. Finally it's time for him to come home from the hospital once and for all. And he starts to get really anxious, not about the

cancer, but about going back to school bald, and standing out, and being different, that sort of thing. As he comes home from the hospital that night he steps into his house, his house is all dark. And then bang on come the lights and out jumped 50 of his friends. “Welcome home” they screamed. As he looks around the room he looks in disbelief. Because when he sees all 50 of his friends, guys and girls, they had shaved their heads. They had shaved their heads. Because they wanted to be with him. They wanted him to know that they were with him, that they felt for him. That they had his best interest at heart. Do you and I have friends like that? Are you a friend like that? Friendship is critical, it's important to The human experience. And learning to have great friendships is something you should make a priority in your life.

No one is a better friend than Jesus. And no one teaches us better about friendship than Jesus. What does Jesus teach us? He teaches us that friends lay their lives down for each other. And he doesn't just talk about it. Lots of people talk about a lot of stuff in this world. Jesus, he just didn't talk about laying down his life for his friends. He laid his life down for his friends. He did not use us as bear bait. But rather, he said you know what, I'll let the bear take

me so you can live life to the fullest. That's friendship. Are your friends helping you become the best version of yourself? And if not, what are we doing? Because at the heart of friendship is the desire to see the other person reach all of their God-given potential.

And Jesus, he is our best friend. And as our shepherd he will not rest until we come to the destiny for which we were created, life with God the Father in heaven. Let's keep Jesus and His Love at the center of our hearts.