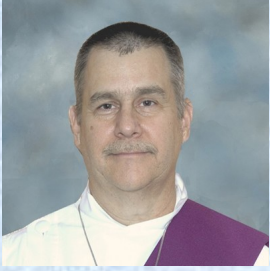


Homily Rerun: May 21, 2017 - Deacon Bruce



It sometimes seems that we live in a culture of despair. Just reading or listening to the news these days is almost enough to depress anyone. Terrible things are happening everywhere, and so many people seem to live in despair. You have been around people like that, the ones that bring you down, the ones that, just being around them, seem to suck the joy right out of your life – like in the Harry Potter stories, I see them as the dementors of modern life.

How is it that they cannot see anything worthwhile in the world around them? They may be externalizing the fear that life is too difficult to imagine. All this negativity is not all that new at all. This negativity expresses the reality of those who live without hope. Their basic attitude is, “Life is difficult, and then we die.” **This is not the proper attitude of a Christian.** Even when faced with the most horrible challenges the world can offer, the Christian is **never** hopeless.

In today’s second reading, St. Peter speaks about the reason for our hope. Our hope is in Jesus Christ who cares for every one of us. Not just all of us, but each of us individually and personally. He understands our struggles better than we understand them ourselves. He brings joy and peace to our lives even when life becomes difficult - **IF** we let Him. We must all keep our focus on the reason for our hope: Jesus Christ. Jesus promised He would never leave us. Jesus tells us, **“And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”** (Matthew 28:20)

As we struggle to maintain our identity as believers in Jesus Christ, we must know that Jesus is ever at our side through the Spirit living within us. If we listen to this Spirit, we will become ever more confident, in spite of the adversities that we may find in our lives, that we can find true joy and that we can make a difference in the world.

The *Bible* assigns several different names to the Holy Spirit - the Consoler, the Advocate, the Sanctifier, and the Paraclete. The *Bible* tells us that the Holy Spirit protects and defends us against our Ancient Enemy. When the Devil accuses us of being rejected by God, the Holy Spirit tells us otherwise and guides us in God’s ways.

He reminds us we are sinners being redeemed. We need our Advocate, our Consoler, our Defender, our Paraclete, the "One called to be beside us" when we face those things that the devil puts into our lives, when we face our darkest moments. When we listen with earnest prayer and patience to the Spirit of God within us, the answer will tell us what the will of God is for us in any situation.

The Gospel today tells us about truth. Usually when we think about truth, we consider it as simply not telling a lie. Well, that is not the whole story. Truth is more than the opposite of saying something that is false. Truth is the opposite of living a lie. Christ speaks about the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth. Truth gives us the ability to live an authentic life in Christ. When we focus in on ourselves, we are living a lie. When we focus on sacrificial love, we are living a genuine, true life. When we make self gratification the goal of our lives, we are living a lie, the lie that **we** can make **ourselves** happy. When we commit ourselves to the Lord, we are living the profound Truth that happiness comes from Him alone.

Today’s readings also speak about joy. In the First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, there is the joy that new Christians in Samaria had after they were baptized by Philip.

In the second reading there is the joy that St. Peter tells us is the reason for our hope. There is the joy that Jesus says comes from the Love of the Father.

We Christians should be truly eternal optimists. We should know and believe that no matter our situation, if we are true to Christ, He will always be the source of our true joy. Although the battle here on earth between good and evil continues, we know how it ends! Jesus is victorious! He saves us all!

We need to ask ourselves, especially in rough times, “Are we always truly living in Joyful Hope?”