

Homily - 3rd Sunday of Easter C (Christianity on God's Own Terms)

According to Prophet Micah, "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8, NIV). It is very important we never lose our focus. Our primary aim of Christianity is the worship of God in Spirit and in truth. Our Second Reading (Rev 5:11-14) shows that we gather in the "Communion of Saints" (angels and saints in heaven and people on earth) to worship the Lamb. We should have no other preoccupation.

Accordingly, we do not come to the Church for activism. That would only distract and confuse innocent Christians who seek a sincere and humble devotion. I read an article in "The Catholic Reporter" recently, which was anything but Catholic. The writer apparently has a Masters Degree in Theology obtained in a Protestant College of Divinity. So I was not surprised how much her views have become disoriented: attacking the Church in favor of same-sex marriage, women ordination, communion to divorced and remarried *without annulment*, and so on. As Jesus says, "For each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush" (Luke 6:44, RSV). If a Catholic wants to study theology, he or she should attend a good Catholic College and learn the right thing.

Raising issues against Christ and his Church is not new. Even the Devil could cite the Scripture in his futile attempt to manipulate Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple (Matt 4:6; cf. Psalm 91:11). Please, in the Church of the Living God, one does not set one's own agenda (cf. 1Tim 3:14-16). Only God sets the agenda. It is not enough to profess Christianity; one must yield to whatever Jesus Christ revealed in word and deed. Christ says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 7:21). The Will of God is NOT negotiable.

In our contemporary world, people want to change the teachings Christ entrusted to his Church: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). How bold and defiant! We see this same tendency in our First Reading (Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41). The Sanhedrin tried to compel the Apostles to give up the proclamation of the universality of salvation in Christ Jesus alone: "We gave you strict orders, did we not, to stop teaching in that name? Notice the Apostles did not give in. Rather in reply they vowed, "We must obey God rather than men." This is what Christianity means. "For what we preach is not ourselves [*not our personal opinions*], but Jesus Christ as Lord" (2Cor 4:5).

Just imagine if the Church fails to stand firm like the Apostles did, and starts editing the bible and her teachings to suit

the agitations of every interest group: African Christians, American Christians, Jewish Christians, Egyptian Christians, Atheists, Feminists, Liberal Protestants, etc. In the end, will the Bible remain the Bible as inspired by the Holy Spirit? Would it not amount to stripping Jesus, not only of his clothes, but also of his intrinsic revelation and command? As "Ratzinger [Pope Benedict] wondered in this pointed question, "What possible value can a theology have which is cut off from its own foundations?" [Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Foundations and Approaches of Biblical Exegesis", in *Origins*, February 11, 1988, vol. 17: no. 35, p.595]

Beloved, we are not saying anybody is going to hell. If one is unable to live up to the demands of Christ and his Gospel, one should pray for God's mercy. The Pope has no mandate to adjust the Inspired Word of God or to change the teachings of Christ's Church from the beginning. See what happened in our Gospel passage (Jn. 21:1-19). Jesus had already commissioned the Apostles, saying, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19; Mark 1:17). However, our gospel shows how they were not focused, somewhat putting aside God's call for their own interest. Simon Peter said, "I am going fishing." The others said, "We also will come with you." Notice that they worked all night and "caught nothing". Do you see the implication of putting aside God's Word for our own desires?

It was within this context that "Jesus said to Simon Peter (three times), "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" And each time, he told him, "Feed my sheep. That is, focus on my Church. "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14). Notice the strong point Jesus communicated to Peter, "Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Beloved let us give up false religiosity and embrace mature and intrinsic religiosity. Allow God to lead you to where you would rather not go.

Finally, if I may ask, "Is seeking to worship "God" according to our own desires and tastes, rather than according to God's Will revealed, not equivalent to seeking to erect the modern "Tower of Babel" or the "Golden Calf"? Remember also how some Israelites rejected God and said to Samuel, "Appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations" (1Sam 8:5). What a shame! Let none be carried away by "End-Time Phenomena" (2Tim 4:3-4). In the Act of Faith we profess, "O my God, I believe in you and all that your Church teaches, because you have revealed it and your word is true. All that I am and all that I have are your gifts". This is the humble way to follow God – the way embraced by the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other Early Christians (cf. Acts 2:42) and gained salvation. Amen!