

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR A 2020.

The portrayal of the disciples in the Gospels is extremely authentic and very believable. If anyone of us were writing an account of such hallowed souls, I am sure we would be concentrating on their saintliness and holiness and their great insight and wisdom; and yet the Gospel writers present them as slow of understanding, sometimes fractious, difficult to teach and just very human. Study St Mark's gospel for instance and the sense of irritation at the ineptness of the disciples can be heard in the many discourses Jesus has with them.

Take Philip for example. Philip has been with Jesus from the very beginning. Jesus says to Philip those words that at some point in our lives we have all heard Jesus say "Follow me." We are told he doubts at the possibility of Jesus being able to feed 5000 people, and we hear that he is approached by the Greeks, the gentiles to broker a meeting with Jesus; "sir", they say "we wish to see Jesus".

Philip is with Jesus, listening to him, watching him, doing what he is told to do by him, telling others of him right throughout the earthly ministry of Jesus and yet when Jesus suggests that the disciples know who the Father is, Philip pipes up, "Lord, let us see the Father and we will be satisfied." And the response of Jesus can almost be heard with a hint of impatience, "Have I been with you all this time Philip and you still do not know me?" How could Philip not see what has been right before his eyes all this time? Probably for the same reasons that individuals who spend time with Jesus and even whole groups who claim to be followers can claim all kinds of things about his identity, his teaching and his practices and even look at Jesus and see in him other gods than the one God creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

We touched on this last week, in the claim of Jesus to be the Shepherd and the gate to the Sheepfold, and it comes up again this week in the teaching of Jesus that he is The Way, the Truth and The Life and that nobody goes to the Father except through him. However, let us get back to the important central pillar of the Christian Faith, that in Jesus, seeing Jesus we see God.

Teachers and lecturers may be aware of these statistics:

We Remember, 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 50% of what we see and hear, 70% of what we discuss with others, 80% of what we personally experience, 95% of what we teach others. These statistics are extremely interesting when applied to the disciples and as a framework to build us up in the faith, not only that we may see more clearly the Father in the Son, but others might get to see the same through us, what the Church would term Mission.

If we discount the supposed letters past between King Abgarus of Edessa and Jesus, there is only one instance in the Gospels where Jesus commits his thoughts in writing, and that is when the woman is caught in adultery and he writes in the dust. So the Disciples had nothing in writing from which to account for the 10% that they could remember Jesus. We on the other hand have the scriptures but yet if the formula holds true we will only remember a tenth of it. The disciples heard Jesus teaching a great deal and so that would account for a fifth of their remembrance. They witnessed Jesus healing and casting out demons, but this still only accounts for a third of what they remember. Of course all this for us is still bound up mostly with what we hear during the reading of scripture.

But then the curve starts to rise. Putting together what they saw and what they heard accounted for half of what they knew about Jesus, and it rises again when they could share amongst themselves that information. Full understanding comes in personal experience and finally what the disciples went on to teach others. Notice however that the fullest knowledge presented by the disciples as to the full identity and work of Jesus and what they went on to teach others eventually through the establishment of the church only happens after the gift of the Holy Spirit. Philip could only grasp a certain amount of what he had seen and heard, but it is the Holy Spirit that would eventually lead them into all truth, from the darkness of ignorance into the light of understanding.

It follows then, that as the church, founded by Christ and given its mission by the gifts and outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we truly make Christ real and point others to God in Christ when we remember Christ not just in the hearing of scripture, not just in the reading of scripture, not just what we discuss with others and not just what we experience or teach others. It has to have as its

foundation the pulling together of all these elements through the life of the church and the gift of the Spirit. Without the prolonged experience of the Church people tend to read and hear what they want to from scripture. Without the prolonged experience of the church people will only see and hear what is bad and what is second hand usually prejudiced information. Without the prolonged experience of the church people may do nice things and teach others that that is the gospel, but persevering with the church we hear and read and speak and act and teach out of the knowledge that Jesus is the image of the Father and he is all truth.

Philip had to learn and so does the world and so do we sometimes that when he asked to see the Father, that is exactly what he was doing all the time he was with Jesus, seeing the Father. This is the task and role of the Church. When we present Jesus in all truth, and no other, and when we are prepared to persevere with it, we will indeed to go and do great things. St Philip went on and did great things. He preached the gospel to the people of Asia Minor and was crucified for his love of Jesus. After Pentecost he saw the Father in Jesus and for that was taken to one of those many rooms in the Fathers mansion.

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